West Germany and Israel

By the late 1960s, West Germany and Israel were moving in almost opposite diplomatic directions in a political environment dominated by the Cold War. The Federal Republic launched ambitious policies to reconcile with its Iron Curtain neighbors, expand its influence in the Arab world, and promote West European interests vis-à-vis the United States. By contrast, Israel, unable to obtain peace with the Arabs after its 1967 military victory and threatened by Palestinian terrorism, became increasingly dependent upon the United States, estranged from the USSR and Western Europe, and isolated from the Third World. Nonetheless, the two countries remained connected by shared security concerns, personal bonds, and recurrent evocations of the German Jewish past. Drawing upon newly available sources covering the first decade of the countries’ formal diplomatic ties, Carole Fink reveals the underlying issues that shaped these two countries’ fraught relationship and sets their foreign and domestic policies in a global context.

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To Juanita Winner
Contents

List of Illustrations and Maps  page viii
Preface  ix
Acknowledgments  xv
A Note on Usage  xvii
List of Abbreviations  xviii

1 Prologue: Distant States – West Germany and Israel, 1952–1965  1
3 Upheaval  45
4 1968  74
5 Changes in Leadership: 1969  102
6 Ostpolitik  124
7 1971: A Dense Political Web  154
8 The Year of Munich  185
9 Annus Terribilis  219
10 Finale: Exeunt Meir and Brandt  261

Conclusions  292
Bibliography  297
Index  336
Illustrations and Maps

Illustrations

1.1 Eichmann Trial, 1961  page 9
2.1 Ben-Gurion with Adenauer, Israel 1966  26
2.2 Anti-German Demonstration, 1965  35
5.1 Asher Ben-Natan at the University of Frankfurt, 1969  114
6.1 Eban at Dachau, 1970  126
6.2 Brandt’s Kniefall, 1970  151
8.1 Abortive West German negotiations with the Palestinians, 1972  204
9.1 Golda Meir and Willy Brandt, 1973  240
9.2 Dayan and Meir in Golan Heights, Yom Kippur War, 1973  252
10.1 Brandt and Sadat, 1974  282

Maps

3.1 Israel: Before and after June 1967 War  page 54
7.1 Germany: Ostpolitik and Nahostpolitik, 1967–1974  158
9.1 The October 1973 War: The Golan Front  247
9.2 The October 1973 War: The Suez-Sinai Front  248
Preface

Nothing, however, was ever simple between Israel and Germany.¹

This is a study that links Central Europe and the Middle East. It originated almost two decades ago in a conversation with an eminent Israeli scholar who stated, “Israel had no 1968, it had 1967.” Struck by his differentiation between the global summons for political, cultural, and social change in the late 1960s and the public environment in his country after its spectacular military victory, I decided to delve deeper into this gap.

Drawing on my background as an international historian, I chose to focus on the relationship between West Germany and Israel in the period between 1965 and 1974, the first nine years of their formal diplomatic tie. This period was marked not only by major domestic changes in both countries but also by the transformation of world politics. Like all research projects pursued over a long period, this one has grown and expanded as new documentation surfaced, a rich trove of published material became available, and new questions arose.

The investigation of a bilateral relationship offers a valuable, nuanced point of observation of change and continuity in domestic, national, and international history. And few diplomatic partnerships embody the level of complexity as do the ties between the heir to the Third Reich and the refuge of its victims. On May 12, 1965, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the State of Israel announced the opening of diplomatic relations, a singular event that has been commemorated over succeeding decades. The beginning, however, was a difficult one. During its first nine years, the bond between these two countries – strikingly unequal in their size, population, and power – was molded not only by a volatile external environment

¹ Asher Ben Natan [Israel’s first ambassador to West Germany], “Bridges over Many Chasms,” in Otto Romberg and Heiner Lichtenstein, eds., Thirty Years of Diplomatic Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel (Frankfurt: Tribüne Books, 1995), p. 49.
dominated by the global Cold War but also by their often conflicting national and domestic desiderata.

Moreover, there was an even more problematic dimension, the tragic German-Jewish past, which each side interpreted differently. The FRG’s goal after 1965 was to establish a normal relationship that focused more on the present and the future than on the past. Israel, on the other hand, was determined to maintain its special character, insisting that the crimes of Nazi Germany had created a permanent obligation for unconditional support and protection.

To be sure, informal West German–Israeli relations had already commenced on September 10, 1952, with the treaty signed in Luxembourg in which West Germany had agreed to pay Israel DM 3.5 billion in restitution in kind. This historic agreement, which had raised strong domestic opposition, required the intervention of both countries’ forceful and pragmatic founding leaders, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, to achieve ratification and to implement its terms.²

Nonetheless, up to 1965, there was a good measure of congruence in the two countries’ interests. Both were firmly in the US camp and opposed the Soviet Union, the overlord of seventeen million East Germans and three million Soviet Jews. On the bilateral plane, the Bonn government enhanced its moral and political standing through its annual payments to Israel, which were crucial to the latter’s economic development. The two countries also established secret military and financial ties.

Yet there is also general agreement among scholars that these initial years were more gray than golden. West Germany refused to risk its relations with the Arab world by exchanging ambassadors with Israel; and Israeli officials, noting the large number of Third Reich holdovers in office, referred to Bonn as a “Republic of Restoration.”³ By the early 1960s, global and domestic conditions began to change, and tensions accumulated on both sides. Nonetheless, until Adenauer and Ben-Gurion left office in 1963, their blend of Moral- and Realpolitik prevailed.⁴

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West Germany’s first international crisis in 1965 gave rise to the striking shift between the two countries. In the wake of the exposure of the FRG’s arms deliveries to Israel, followed by Egypt’s invitation to the reviled GDR leader Walter Ulbricht, Chancellor Ludwig Erhard suddenly ceased delivering weapons, but also offered to change course by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Both sides paid a heavy price for the normalization of their ties. Bonn’s decision led to the feared rupture with ten Arab countries; and Israel had to yield to West German terms for recognition and to the new ground rules of bilateral negotiations. In real as well as symbolic terms, the initial bond, managed by elites outside of public scrutiny and dominated by a past they had both experienced and sought to overcome, was at an end.

The next critical juncture occurred two years later in the wake of Israel’s overwhelming military victory in the June 1967 war, its occupation of Arab territories, and the Great Powers’ inability to forge a peace. Thereupon, the two countries began moving in different directions. As scholars have noted, West Germany now perceived its ties with Israel as an obstacle to promoting its interests – breaking the Cold War gridlock in Europe and regaining its place in the Arab world backed by increased public support for an evenhanded Middle East policy. Less known is the Israeli response examined in this book. Confronted by obdurate enemies, including a militant Palestinian national movement, its government and people continued to expect and demand Bonn’s full support. The gulf between West Germany and Israel continued to widen as each country faced regional crises and foreign policy setbacks in 1968

Adenauer’s side admiringly, while the Israeli historian Yeshayahu Jelinek, *Deutschland und Israel, 1945 1965: Ein neurotisches Verhältnis* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), is critical of the chancellor and his officials. Earlier works by Jekutiel Deligdisch, *Die Einstellung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zum Staate Israel: Eine Zusammenfassung der Entwicklung seit 1949* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1974), and Inge Deutschkron, *Israel und die Deutschen: Das schwierige Verhältnis* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983), are still useful.


and also when FRG public opinion – especially on the Left – adopted a pro-Palestinian stance.9

The diplomatic and political changes that occurred in 1969 further widened the rift. The Superpower détente forged by Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev failed to extend to the Middle East, which exploded in two wars, the second giving rise to a global oil crisis.10 After 1969 the West German and Israeli governments occupied strikingly different places in international politics. Willy Brandt’s SPD-FDP coalition implemented its bold Ost- and Nahostpolitik, while also maintaining the FRG’s bonds with NATO and strengthening its ties with Western Europe.11 Israel, under Golda Meir’s unwieldy coalition, unable to negotiate directly with its adversaries, refused to submit to outside mediation and, except for mounting US support, found itself increasingly isolated.12

Not surprisingly, between 1970 and 1974, West German–Israeli relations underwent several crises that are analyzed closely in this book.13 These included an ill-conceived German Kulturwoche in 1971, the failed rescue of the Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympics, and the tensions that arose during and after the October 1973 war. There were also major differences over the Palestinian question and over the EEC’s attempt to expand its role in the Middle East.

Bilateral negotiations became increasingly contentious in this period. Each country’s press assumed a sharper tone toward the other, and, with some exceptions, public opinion continued to cool toward the relationship. Federal Republic officials, far less preoccupied with the Nazi past than were their predecessors, resisted Israeli demands for unconditional


support. Moreover, the contrasting personalities and political styles of Meir and Brandt magnified their disagreements, which their personal encounters scarcely mitigated.\textsuperscript{14}

Nonetheless, when both Meir and Brandt left office in 1974, the frayed West German–Israeli relationship had not been jettisoned. A remarkable fluctuation of discord and stability had been established, marked by the almost predictably tense encounters and the omnipresent shadow of third parties. Although neither friendship nor trust had been achieved between the two countries on an official or public level, they remained connected by practical security concerns and the ritualized assertions of their historical bond.\textsuperscript{15} And with some significant changes by Brandt’s and Meir’s successors – and several difficult moments – this bond has continued to this day.

There is a rich scholarly literature on West German–Israeli diplomatic relations, which is listed in the Bibliography. Three notable books have dealt with West Germany and Israel after 1965. The pioneering study by political scientist Lily Gardner Feldman, \textit{The Special Relationship between Germany and Israel} (1985), attempts to define its character; George Lavy’s \textit{Germany and Israel: Moral Debt and National Interest} (1996) stresses continuities with the past; and Markus A. Weingardt’s \textit{Deutsche Israel- und Nahostpolitik: Die Geschichte einer Gratwanderung seit 1949} (2002) presents more of a chronicle than an analysis. But none of these authors had access to the range of documentary sources I have examined, delved in such depth into the two countries’ interactions with each other and with third parties, or fully explained how both sides’ rhetoric and actions relating to the German-Jewish past, present, and future were reconfigured.

This book draws primarily on the unpublished records in British, French, German, Israeli, Russian, and US archives. Other important sources include the indispensable West German and Israeli government publications (some newly available online), the memoirs and letters of principal participants and observers, contemporary press reports, biographies of key figures, and new scholarly studies in several languages.

It places the West German–Israeli relationship squarely within an international context and examines the dynamics in depth. Both


countries were active players in regional and global affairs. But although they conducted their foreign policies in different ways, they were affected by the other’s diplomacy and constrained by spoken and unspoken obligations.

This book’s principal focus is on the decision makers, but there is also extensive coverage of domestic politics as well as of social, economic, and cultural developments in both countries.

To be sure, there are still contested questions inherent in this history. My goal has been to present as comprehensive, balanced, and fair an account as possible.

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Because of this book’s primary focus on the West German relationship with Israel, the terms “Bonn,” “Federal Republic” (or FRG), and “Germany” are used interchangeably to describe this government.

Also, because much of Israeli diplomacy was conducted in Jerusalem, I have occasionally designated that city as a synonym for the country, but without taking a position on its international legal status.
Abbreviations

AA  
Auswärtiges Amt (German Foreign Ministry)

AAPD  
Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands

ACDP  
Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Sankt Augustin

ACSP  
Archiv für Christlich-Soziale Politik, Hans Seidl Stiftung, Munich

AdL  
Archiv des Liberalismus, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Gummersbach

AdsD  
Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn-Bad Godesberg

AE  
Abba Eban Papers, Truman Institute, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

AJC  
American Jewish Committee

AJCA  
American Jewish Committee Archive, New York

AN  

AVP RF  
Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, Moscow

BAF  
Bundesarchiv Freiburg

BAK  
Bundesarchiv Koblenz

BAL  
Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde

BayHStA  
Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich

BSA  
Bayerische Staatsarchiv, Munich

CC  
Claims Conference Archive, New York

CDU  
Christian Democratic Union, Germany

CPSU  
Communist Party of the Soviet Union

CSCE  
Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

CSU  
Christian Social Union, Germany

CZA  
Central Zionist Archive Jerusalem

DM  
Deutsche Mark (West German/German currency 1948–2002)
DPA German Press Agency (Deutsche Presse-Agentur), Hamburg

EB Egon Bahr papers, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn-Bad Godesberg

EEC European Economic Community

FCO Great Britain. Foreign and Commonwealth Office [created in 1968 with the merger of the two offices]

FDP Free Democrat Party, Germany

FM Israel. Foreign Ministry

FO Great Britain. Foreign Office

FMAE France. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, La Courneuve

FRG Federal Republic of Germany

FRUS Foreign Relations of the United States

Gahal Herut-Liberal Bloc (Gush Herut-Liberalim) Israel

GB NA Great Britain, National Archives. Kew

GDR German Democratic Republic (East Germany)

Herut Freedom Party (Herut), Israel

IDF Israel Defense Forces

IISH Archive of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam

ISA Israel State Archive, Jerusalem

JTA Jewish Telegraph Agency

Jusos Young Socialists (Jungsozialisten), Germany


MAE France. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mapai Workers’ Party of the Land of Israel [Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael]

MInn Staatsministerium des Innern. Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv Munich

NARA National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NPD National Democratic Party, Germany

NRP National Religious Party, Israel

OAPEC Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries

OAU Organization of African Unity

OPEC Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PA AA  Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry, Berlin
PFLP  Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO  Palestine Liberation Organization
PM  Prime Minister’s Files, Israel State Archive, Jerusalem
Pompidou Papers of French President Georges Pompidou, Archives Nationales, Paris
PRC  People’s Republic of China
Prem  Great Britain National Archives, Prime Minister’s Files
RAF  Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion), Germany
RK NSF  Robert Komer National Security Files, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX
Schmidt  Helmut Schmidt Archive, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Bonn-Bad Godesberg.
SDS  Socialist German Student Union (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund), Germany
SED  Socialist Unity Party of Germany [Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands], East Germany
SI  Socialist International
SPD  Social Democratic Party Germany
StA  Staatsanwaltschaft, Bayerische Staatsarchiv, Munich
StenBer  Germany Bundestag. Stenographische Berichte
StK  Staatskanzlei (State Chancellery) Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich
UN  United Nations
UNA  United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York
UNRWA  United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USDS  US Department of State records, National Archives and Record Service, Washington, DC
WBA  Willy Brandt Archive, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn-Bad Godesberg
YIVO  YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, Center for Jewish History, New York City
ZEJD  Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, Heidelberg
1 Prologue: Distant States – West Germany and Israel, 1952–1965

My political friends and I support the establishment of normal relations between Germany and Israel . . . if its government wants it so.¹

We cannot defend a border only with diplomats; we also need weapons.²

In March 1960, on the eve of the crucial Four Power Summit in Paris, two anxious elderly statesmen visited Washington, DC, the eighty-four-year-old Chancellor Konrad Adenauer seeking President Eisenhower’s assurances on the future of West Berlin, and the seventy-three-year-old Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion hoping to expand US military assistance against Israel’s Arab enemies.³ But an equally significant event took place in New York, where the two men were lodged at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and where, at 9:30 a.m. on March 14, the first meeting occurred between the leader of the heir to the Third Reich and the founder of the refuge for its victims.⁴

Both statesmen had prepared carefully.⁵ Ben-Gurion, who insisted that Germany’s crimes against the Jewish people could never be erased, presented the chancellor with a request for two major forms of assistance: a 10- to 20-year,

¹ Nov. 17, 1960, statement in Tel Aviv by West Berlin’s mayor and SPD party leader Willy Brandt on his first visit to Israel, HaTzofe, Nov. 18, 1960. (Thanks to Opher Kutner for this reference.)
⁵ Details from Ben Gurion’s diary and the Israeli archives in Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel: Ein neurrotisches Verhältnis (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), pp. 313 15.
$40–$50 million loan agreement for development projects in the Negev desert as well as substantial military assistance to protect Israel against its Soviet-armed neighbors. Adenauer, who praised Israel’s accomplishments, readily agreed but without assenting to the actual details.

After their private two-hour tête-à-tête, their genial press conference and the front-page photographs of the two smiling leaders startled their countries and the world. Even more disconcerting, however, was their silence over ending the eight-year absence of formal diplomatic relations between their two countries.

Cold War Overview, 1952–1964

Seven years after the end of World War II, the two nuclear-armed Superpowers had appeared to dominate the entire globe. In Asia, the bloody war in Korea had militarized their rivalry. And in Europe, the Cold War’s heartland, the United States and the Soviet Union had virtually divided the continent: in the West, with twelve governments linked by the US-supported NATO alliance, and in the East, with seven Communist states tied politically and economically to the Kremlin. At the center were the two German states separated by ideology and an Iron Curtain: a liberal, capitalist, and fiercely anti-Communist government

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6 Jelinek/Blasius, “Ben Gurion und Adenauer,” pp. 330–45, contains the remarkably similar translators’ notes in English and German; however, in the English version (p. 334) Ben Gurion requests a $50 million loan for a period of 10 years, while the German (p. 337) records a 10 to 20 year/$40–$50 million figure.


8 The longer portion of the conversation consisted of a tour d’horizon of global politics. Both Cold Warriors concurred on the Soviet menace and Washington’s pre election disarray. However, when focusing on the Third World, Ben Gurion drawing on Israel’s positive experiences displayed far more optimism than Der Alte over winning the nonaligned nations into the Western camp where both countries had launched extensive aid programs, the Bonn government competing strenuously against its East German rival in Asia and Africa (William Glenn Gray, Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969 [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003], pp. 116–19), and Israel, on a more modest level, vying against Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser in the nonaligned world (Nora Levin, “Technical Cooperation: Israel’s Way in the Third World and Administered Territories,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 26, no. 4 [Apr. 1970]: 46–52; Leopold Laufer, “Israel and the Third World,” Political Science Quarterly 87, no. 4 [Dec. 1972]: 615–30).


claiming to represent the entire German people, and a Marxist govern-
ment proclaiming its peaceful, antifascist credentials.

Yet by the mid-1950s, the Cold War had assumed a more complex
aspect. Facing the spread of neutralist sentiment – especially among the
former colonial peoples in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia – the new
leadership in Moscow and in Washington expanded their competition
into the Third World. Except for a brief pause during the 1956 Suez crisis,
the United States and the Soviet Union poured advisors, arms, and
development aid into the Third World to preserve and expand their
respective political realms. But also by the late 1950s there were new
expressions of independence from Superpower domination, including
a revived Western Europe that created a six-member Common Market,
a United Nations Organization that had doubled in size and now con-
tained a non-Western, non-Communist majority, and the formation of
OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in September 1960, linking six countries whose product had become
crucial to the world’s economy.11

Although the Cold War stalemate in Europe was con-
fi
rmed by
the August 1961 erection of the Berlin Wall, the Global Cold War continued
to expand. In Asia, the Soviets faced the threat of a nuclear-armed rival in
Communist China, while the United States attempted to suppress
Communist-dominated governments in Indochina. In Latin America, the
flow of missiles into the Soviets’ Cuban outpost nearly triggered a nuclear war
in 1962. And in the Middle East, the Superpowers vied for influence over
a half-dozen rival Arab regimes.

In the early 1960s, a new word – détente – had entered the Cold War
vocabulary. Recognizing the costs and perils of their long rivalry, US and
Soviet leaders were prepared to declare a truce in Europe and to pursue
arms limitation, but not to end their competition in the Third World. And
it was within this evolving twelve-year Cold War background that two
distant – but also related – countries formed and developed their extra-
ordinary ties.

**A Chilly Relationship: West Germany and Israel after 1952**12

After concluding their historic 1952 Restitution Agreement in
Luxemburg, there were no official ties between West Germany and

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12 Essential studies of this period based on extensive archival documentation include
Hannfried von Hindenburg, *Demonstrating Reconciliation: State and Society in West
German Foreign Policy toward Israel, 1952–1965* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007);
Israel until 1965. During the negotiations, Adenauer had proposed to combine restitution with the inauguration of diplomatic relations between the two countries, thereby confronting his domestic opponents and the irate Arab governments with one bold gesture instead of “separate installments.” However, because of Israel’s high percentage of Holocaust survivors and its fierce critics of any dealings with Germany, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett had insisted on delaying formal ties.

Three years later, the situation was reversed. In May 1955, the Federal Republic had regained almost full sovereignty, joined the NATO alliance, and developed one of the strongest economies in Western Europe; it was also about to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR. Israel, on the other hand, was threatened by the flow of Soviet-bloc arms into Egypt and an Arab economic boycott. Recognizing Germany’s new stature and fearing its demotion in Bonn’s political and economic priorities, Ben-Gurion

13 In the Sept. 10, 1952, agreement (an unprecedented arrangement between a successor state and one that did not exist when the Nazis’ crimes were committed), the FRG granted the sum of DM 3.5 billion to the State of Israel, to be paid over a period of 14 years to the Israeli purchasing delegation in Cologne, which enabled the country to build an infrastructure of roads, railways, shipping, and industry at a time it was suffering a severe shortage of foreign currency. Details in Nana Sagi, German Reparations: A History of the Negotiations, trans. Dafna Alon (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980); also Nicholas Balabkins, West German Reparations and Israel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971); Michael Wolffsohn, “Das deutsch israelische Wiedergutmachungsabkommen von 1952 im internationalen Zusammenhang,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 36, no. 4 (1988): 691–731.

14 Hindenburg, Demonstrating Reconciliation, pp. 48–49.

15 Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, pp. 158–59; also Gardner Feldman, Special Relationship, pp. 157–58.
made an overture for full diplomatic relations, which met a brusque No from the Auswärtiges Amt.\textsuperscript{16}

The Adenauer government, now facing Arab threats to recognize East Germany if it established official ties with Israel, had become a captive of its Hallstein doctrine – based on the priority of a single, reunified Germany – which forced Bonn to placate blackmailers.\textsuperscript{17} The United States also played a role in this transformation. Unlike in 1952 when it had urged Adenauer to initiate the Restitution Agreement with Israel, this time the Eisenhower administration – which was encouraging Bonn to play a larger role in the Arab world – was cool to any move that intensified unrest in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{18}

Over the next five years, until their historic March 1960 encounter, Adenauer and Ben-Gurion attempted to establish quasi-normal conditions between their two countries. Although refusing to send an emissary to Israel, the Federal Republic, seeking to uphold its moral standing in Western capitals, promptly made its annual restitution payments.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, in November 1956 Bonn, insisting on its neutrality, rebuffed strong US pressure to suspend these payments until Israel withdrew its forces after the Sinai-Suez War.\textsuperscript{20}

Israel, without abandoning its hope for normal relations, pursued alternative ties with the Federal Republic. Using its Restitution Purchasing Mission in Cologne, which functioned as an informal diplomatic post, the foreign ministry attempted to win support from German


\textsuperscript{20} Weingardt, \textit{Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik}, pp. 113 14, which not only won strong Israeli gratitude but may also have strengthened its negotiating position vis à vis Washington.
politicians and journalists, and from the public. In 1957, Ben-Gurion dispatched Shimon Peres to Germany where Israel’s deputy defense minister established a close bond with the FRG’s defense minister, Franz-Josef Strauss, who considered Israel a key Cold War partner against the Soviet-armed Arabs. That year, Israel began its secret sales of Uzi machine guns followed by other weapons and uniform materials to the Bundeswehr, which not only helped the country’s balance of payments but also set the stage for its acquiring non-military materials from Germany.

Inevitably there were leaks, and Der Spiegel’s June 1959 revelations of these arms arrangements created an outcry in both countries. But while the Adenauer government downplayed their significance, Ben-Gurion took the opportunity to announce his position on “the German question.” Before the Knesset on July 1, Israel’s prime minister made three major points: that the Federal Republic, unlike its Communist neighbor, had assumed moral and financial responsibility for the Nazis’ atrocities against the Jews; that the acquisition of German weapons was essential to the transformation of the Jewish people from a Diaspora civilization to a sovereign nation inhabiting its own land and charged with the obligation to protect its citizens; and that the danger of another Holocaust came not from West Germany but from the “Nazis of the present” – the Arabs.


These arrangements were greatly facilitated by Israel’s Purchasing Mission in Cologne. Shinnar, Bericht eines Beauftragten, pp. 120-23.


The Nazi past continued to weigh heavily on the Federal Republic. On Christmas Eve in 1959, right-wing vandals defaced the newly restored Cologne synagogue with swastikas, followed by a two-month wave of desecrations of almost one hundred Jewish cemeteries throughout West Germany.  

East Germany, whose Stasi along with the Soviet KGB had stirred this antisemitic campaign to discredit its western neighbor, immediately released a barrage of bulletins against the “renazified” Federal Republic, criticizing its holdover judiciary from the Third Reich and its laxness in prosecuting war criminals.  

In response, Bonn, on the eve of the chancellor’s trip to America, launched its own public relations campaign, emphasizing the government’s and public’s condemnation of the attacks, West Germany’s thriving democracy, and its staunch anti-Communism. Nonetheless, both the timing of the New York meeting and the chancellor’s accommodating responses to Ben-Gurion were undoubtedly affected by the shock of Cologne.

After the historic New York encounter, Germany’s non-official relations with Israel expanded. Under Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, Bonn had already begun sending its youth to Israel to work on social projects; in October 1961, the first German volunteers arrived at Kibbutz Urim, and the first German students traveled to Israel. Other signs of closer non-
governmental ties included the establishment of professorships in Jewish cultural and intellectual history at German universities, the founding of the Cologne library *Germania Judaica*, and the close relations between the German Federation of Trade Unions and Israel’s Histadrut. The SPD, led by West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt, called for the establishment of diplomatic ties between the FRG and Israel and sent a delegation to meet its Mapai counterparts in January 1961. Conservative intellectuals and politicians such as Eugen Gerstenmaier (a former member of the anti-Nazi resistance) also sought to open a dialogue with Israelis.

Although these overtures were welcomed by the Israeli government, the public responded cautiously to German overtures. And, apart from the expense and diplomatic complications, Ben-Gurion remained unenthusiastic over dispatching Israeli youth groups to West Germany or permitting Israeli students to study in German universities.

### The Eichmann Trial

Israel’s capture of SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann, one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, and his trial in Jerusalem between April and December 1961 raised enormous tension between the two states. Ben-Gurion, reversing his earlier aloofness toward the Holocaust, aimed at educating young Israelis on the Third Reich’s crimes in order to underline the indispensability of the state of Israel, which would conduct its own Nuremberg trial to prosecute crimes against the Jewish people.
Nonetheless, Israel’s realist leader was also determined not to disrupt its growing ties with Bonn.  

The trial was deeply embarrassing to the Adenauer government, which was also facing a new US administration and a national election in September. The Eichmann trial not only trained a spotlight on the Nazi era but also highlighted the presence of former Nazis in public life, above all the chancellor’s indispensable state secretary Hans Globke who, among his other questionable activities under the Third Reich, had contributed to drafting the ordinances to enforce the 1935 Nuremberg race laws. Determined to mitigate the trial’s negative effects – and tamp down on new waves of Communist propaganda – the Auswärtiges Amt

38 Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, pp. 345–46; Weingardt, Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik, pp. 133–35.  
launched a propaganda campaign to separate the FRG from the Third Reich and the German nation from the Nazis, placing Eichmann within a small group of SS-perpetrators. It also formed an interministerial task force to orchestrate Bonn’s policy and sent an Observers Mission to Jerusalem to monitor the trial. On Adenauer’s orders, the Federal Intelligence Service gathered a myriad of information on the Israeli judges, prosecutors, and witnesses, as well as on the accused, and the chancellor personally dispatched the journalist Rolf Vogel to meet with Ben-Gurion.40

Ben-Gurion was reluctant to embarrass a partner who more than a year earlier had agreed to provide generous development loans.41 Moreover, Bonn had already signaled that the financial negotiations would be suspended until the conclusion of the Eichmann trial,42 and Defense Minister Strauss had made clear the price of military supplies.43

Globke, who was under investigation by federal officials for his role in the deportation of Greek and Slovak Jews (Weingardt, Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik, p. 134, n. 233), was also the crucial contact person between the chancellor’s office and both Julius Klein and Israel’s foreign ministry. Wiesen, “Germany’s PR Man,” pp. 298 99.


Vogel (1921 1994), the son of a half Jewish mother (who was deported to Theresienstadt) and who was ejected from the Wehrmacht, after 1945 became a journalist (and observer at the Nuremberg trials), film maker, and in 1959 deputy director of the Bonn office of the European Economic Community. Also, as reserve officer in the Bundeswehr, Vogel had worked with Globke to arrange the Uzi purchases from Israel.

Summoned by the chancellor in 1961 to work with the Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst), Vogel traveled to Jerusalem with a press credential from the Cologne based, pro Adenauer business weekly Deutsche Zeitung.

In a piquant Cold War detail, Vogel and another press colleague also stole documents from an East German attorney (fearing they might incriminate FRG politicians). Klaus Wiegrefe, “Kalter Krieg beim Eichmann Prozess: Aktenklau für die Adenauer Republik,” Der Spiegel (Sept. 2, 2010), http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kalter krieg beim eichmann prozess aktenklau fuer die adenauer republik a 715292.html.


Consequently, the Israeli prime minister took steps to narrow the scope of the trial, focusing on Hitler, Eichmann, and Nazi Germany, omitting any reference to Globke’s wartime activities, and thereby winning Adenauer’s gratitude.\(^ {44} \)

However, contrary to Ben-Gurion’s aim of bolstering a realist, future-facing Israeli narrative, the Eichmann trial also revived the horrors of the German-Jewish past. Occurring in the symbolically potent thirteenth year of Israel’s existence, the daily image of a major Nazi functionary, the two months of testimonies by the 110 carefully selected witnesses, and the round-the-clock media coverage, implanted the slaughter of European Jewry into the consciousness of two million Israelis, and especially among the youth, which up to then had little knowledge of the Holocaust. The conduct of the trial stirred heated debates within Israel and kindled a “deep existential fear and suspicion of the outside world.”\(^ {45} \) It also strengthened Israel’s ties with the Diaspora and, particularly, with the US Jewish community.\(^ {46} \)

With national elections coming up in August, the Herut opposition fanned the wave of popular outrage. Thus when the trial’s end coincided with the erection of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, the Israeli press was largely indifferent to the closure of this final Iron Curtain escape route and the sealing of Germany’s division.\(^ {47} \) And five months later, responding to the “Eichmann shock,”\(^ {48} \) the Ben-Gurion government reluctantly erected new barriers between the two people, including restrictions on German-supported cultural institutions, German artists, and the performance and display of German artworks.\(^ {49} \)


\(^{49}\) Text of Minister of Education and Culture Abba Eban’s statement to the Knesset, Jan. 9, 1962, in Jelinek, _Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik_, pp. 586–93; “Israeli Explains Curbs on Germany,” _New York Times_, Jan. 14, 1962, p. 9; also _Israel Digest_ 5, no. 2 (Jan. 19, 1962); Jelinek, _Deutschland und Israel_, pp. 376–78. No new restrictions were placed, however, on
But almost immediately after the Eichmann trial Ben-Gurion’s two projects also materialized. The first was *Aktion “Geschäftsfreund”* [Project Business-Partner], the secret non-written arrangement according to which Germany between 1961 and 1965 (and with minimal oversight by the lender and at interest rates under 4 percent) extended approximately DM 630 million in long-term loans to Israel, 70 percent of which went to develop the Negev and the remainder allocated to industrial expansion.50

The second, code-named *Aktion “Frank./Kol”* [Project Frankreich/ Kolonien, French Colonies], was built upon the earlier arms-purchase agreements made before 1961 and sealed by Peres’s June 1962 visit to Bonn.51 Over the objections of the Auswärtiges Amt and the reservations of its US ally—both of which feared an Arab backlash—the Bonn government began secretly supplying heavy arms to Israel, including speedboats and submarines, helicopters and transport aircraft, anti-aircraft guns and anti-tank missiles, reaching a total of DM 695.1 million by the end of 1964.52

the well developed scientific collaboration between the Max Planck Institute and the Weizmann Institute.


To maintain internal and foreign secrecy, these annual allocations by the Auswärtiges Amt were listed under the budgetary rubric “Förderung von Entwicklungsländern durch Gewährung von bilateral Kapitalhilfe” [Promotion of developing countries by granting bilateral capital assistance], with the mysterious entry “Geschäftsfreund,” which was eventually extended from 10 to 12 years until 1973 and an approximate total of DM 2 billion. Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik*, pp. 127 29.

In 2015 (the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of German Israeli diplomatic relations), a German nuclear weapons analyst asserted (admittedly without complete evidence) the connection between the funds allocated under *Aktion Geschäftsfreund* and the development of Israel’s nuclear reactor in the Negev city of Dimona: Hans Rühle, “‘Aktion Geschäftsfreund’: Wie Deutschland das israelische Nuklearwaffenprogramm finanziert hat,” *IP Die Zeitschrift*, June 5, 2015, https://zeitschrift.ip.dgap.org/de/ip die zeitschrift/themen/aktion geschaeftsfr. In *Der Spiegel* 15 (Apr. 3, 2015), Shimon Peres firmly denied this allegation without revealing where the funds for Israel’s atomic program had originated, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/israel atomombombe deutsche millionen nicht fuer bau verwendet a 1026997.html. On the other hand, two recent Israeli works, Adam Raz, *ha Ma’avak ’al ha petsatsah* [The struggle for the bomb] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2015) and Ora Herman, *ha Kivshan veha kur: me ahore ha kela’im shel mishpat Aikhman* [The furnace and the reactor: Behind the scenes at the Eichmann trial] (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Hameuchad, 2017) although without documenta tion acknowledge the German financial contribution. I thank Opher Kutner for the last two references.


52 Details: Israel Projekt, Frankreich Kol, 1963 66 BAF BW1/481761; also BW1/2470; BW1/374234; Pauls Aufzeichnung, Oct. 21, 1964, AAPD 1964 3:1164 67. According to Peres, Strauss’s Nov. 1962 resignation over the *Spiegel* affair resulted in significant
Strained Relations 1963–1964

Between March and October 1963, Ben-Gurion and Adenauer both left office with a major question – the establishment of formal diplomatic relations – still unresolved. Adenauer, who had ostensibly hoped to accomplish this in his last year, was not only blocked by his cabinet and an Auswärtiges Amt determined to prevent Arab retaliation by recognizing the increasingly active GDR; Bonn also received no encouragement from Washington to disrupt the volatile political conditions in the Middle East. Although Levi Eshkol and Ludwig Erhard were noticeably less committed than their predecessors to expanding Israeli–West German ties, both countries were nonetheless jarred on December 3: When pressed by a journalist, the new chancellor – citing the Hallstein doctrine – at his first press conference ruled out a formal recognition of Israel.

Before long, the unofficial ties between the two countries deteriorated. There were three potent disputes, each pitting Bonn’s ostensible moral obligation toward Israel against its national interests. After Eshkol entered office, a long-simmering quarrel erupted over the presence of some one hundred German rocket experts in Egypt, posing a powerful psychological threat to the Israeli population of annihilation by an old and a new enemy. Israel had retaliated by launching “Operation limitations on Israeli purchases. Peres, David’s Sling, pp. 75–78; Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, pp. 627–28.

In Feb. 1962, the FRG, facing the closure of Israel’s Cologne Mission when the Restitution Agreement would expire on Mar. 31, 1965, proposed maintaining this diplomatic conduit and also sending a trade mission to Israel, which the Ben Gurion government had refused. Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, p. 440.


Earlier, Eshkol and Erhard, as finance and economic ministers, had two chilly encounters in 1960 and 1962; but because of AA objections they never met as government heads. Jelinek, Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik, pp. 528–30; Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, pp. 611, 684.

New York Times, Dec. 4, 1963, p. 2. Text of the exchange between Erhard and Yediot Ahronot correspondent Alfred Wolfmann in Dunnigan to State Dept., Jan. 9, 1964, NARA USDS RG 59 Pol 17 GerW/Isr, which also reported that Erhard’s unscripted response – his admission of Bonn’s concern over Arab recognition of the GDR and expectation of Israel’s “understanding” of this issue – was more candid than the AA and his CDU colleagues would have preferred.

Damocles,” a terror wave against the German scientists that risked Bonn’s disapprobation.  

Adenauer had been reluctant to remove the scientists, fearing legal complications and Arab retaliation. Erhard, under increased Israeli pressure, only half-heartedly explored legislation and was hesitant to antagonize Nasser—a major figure in the Arab and the non-aligned world—by forcing the scientists to withdraw. Following the logic of the Hallstein doctrine, the chancellor refused to cede the FRG’s presence in the Arab world to its Communist rival. Indeed Paris, London, and Washington all agreed that West German scientists (even those with an NSDAP past) were preferable to East German or Soviet rocket specialists.

A second long-standing issue, Israel’s unfavorable relationship with the Common Market, was only partially settled in 1964. Under Erhard the FRG, which for several years had rebuffed Israeli pressure to endorse its campaign for an associate membership, simply agreed to support an anodyne nonpreferential trade agreement with Brussels.

Finally, Israeli-German relations were greatly agitated by the looming 1965 deadline under which the FRG’s 20-year Statute of Limitations for prosecuting Nazi murderers would expire. Despite the intense media coverage of the two-year-long Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, the German public, large numbers of federal officials, and the majority of Erhard’s cabinet all opposed extending the statute based

Among Nasser’s foreign recruits (which also included Austrian and GDR scientists) was the fifty one year old Dr. Wolfgang Pilz who had worked with Werner von Braun to develop the V 2 rocket during World War II. However, contrary to Israeli suspicions, the Germans had not helped produce the chemical weapons Nasser had used against royalist troops in Yemen.

60 Jansen Aufzeichnung, June 14, 1964, AAPD 1964 1:669 71. It was also widely noted that the FRG’s inactivity restrained Egyptian protests against its “substantial” arms deliveries to Israel. New York Times, June 5, 1964, p. 3.
on legal, practical, and national considerations. However, foreign critics – spurred by Israel and the United States, as well as by the FRG’s Communist neighbors – urged Bonn not to halt the investigations; and within Germany the SPD opposition as well as several CDU parliamentarians pressured the Erhard government to expand the pursuit of Nazi war criminals.

The Crisis

_Aktion Frank./Kol_ inevitably risked exposure. Although implemented through extraordinarily clandestine methods, including the transit of arms through third parties, the FRG’s massive shipments to Israel between 1962 and 1964 were scarcely a secret, except to the German public. As leaks began to accumulate, the _Auswärtiges Amt_ continued to deny a program over which it had no control. Moreover, the program was significantly expanded in June 1964: Reversing earlier US opposition to sending arms to the Middle East, President Lyndon Johnson decided to balance his arms offer to Jordan by compelling a reluctant Erhard to deliver 150 US M-48 tanks to Israel via Italy. Nonetheless, that month at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, AA state secretary Karl

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64 Hansen, _Aus dem Schatten_, pp. 664 73, Weingardt, _Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik_, pp. 144 47; Hindenburg, _Demonstrating Reconciliation_, pp. 80 84.

65 Details in Hindenburg, _Demonstrating Reconciliation_, pp. 85 87. Initially only six (in 1962) and then eight (in 1964) Bundestag members representing the three major parties were apprised of the details.


Carstens categorically denied Egyptian charges that the FRG was supplying arms to Israel.68

The “time bomb” exploded in October 1964 when the Egyptian press suddenly accused the FRG of collaborating in Israel’s secret nuclear program.69 These charges, supplemented by reports of the covert arms sales and reprinted in the Frankfurter Rundschau, Die Welt, and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung between October 26 and October 28 and in the New York Times on October 31, stunned the German public. Despite its vehement denials, the Erhard government fell under attack from all sides: from pro-Arab, pro-Israeli, and middle-of-the-road journalists and from citizens shocked by this demonstration of illegal (supplying weapons to areas of conflict) and incompetent international behavior.70 Israel, also facing a domestic uproar, immediately denied either a nuclear or a military collaboration with Germany.71

Symptomatic of the chilly state of affairs between the two countries, each side blamed the other for the crisis. AA officials believed that Israel had deliberately leaked the details to Cairo in order to pressure Bonn to grant diplomatic recognition, which Israel firmly denied;72 Israel, which suspected its AA opponents of releasing information to Egypt, reminded Erhard that it was the German press that had published the story.73 Moreover, Nasser’s outrage was disingenuous. Not only had he long

68 Carstens Runderlass, June 19, 1964, AAPD 1964 1:694, n. 2. Also, the Bonn government was doing its utmost not to antagonize the Arabs for example, declining to support a major Israeli desalination project and vetoing a meeting between Erhard and Eshkol. Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, pp. 447–48.
71 Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, p. 448. Nonetheless, in a Nov. 22 article in Ma’ariv Ben Gurion confirmed that Germany’s contributions to Israel’s military security “exceeded all other countries.”

73 Gespräch Erhard Shinnar, Nov. 4, 1964, AAPD 1964 2:1236; Peter Hünseler, Die aus senpolitischen Beziehungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zu den arabischen Staaten, von 1949–1980 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 147, n. 330, is skeptical that AA officials passed on secret information to Cairo.
known of the German arms deliveries to Israel; he was also receiving ten times more weapons from the Soviet Union.

Why Nasser seized this particular moment to publish these revelations—shortly after he had hosted the Arab League and Non-Aligned Summit meetings in Cairo and also just after his patron Nikita Khrushchev had been deposed in Moscow—will remain mysterious until scholars gain access to the relevant archives. The Egyptian leader may have been under pressure by the radical Arab regimes in Iraq and Syria to end his forbearance toward the FRG. He may have been urged by the GDR, which had sent large delegations to the Cairo meetings, to embarrass its neighbor. He may also have been attempting to impress the new Soviet leadership (on whom he would be heavily dependent for continued military, industrial, and financial aid because of his ruinous Yemen intervention and balance-of-payments crisis) in order to secure the $250 million loan promised by Khrushchev a month earlier. Or, with the imminent expiration of the 1952 German–Israeli Restitution Agreement and the prospect of new and expanded German aid arrangements with Israel, Nasser’s may simply have been a bold gesture to extract more substantial economic aid and political concessions from Bonn.

Whatever Nasser’s motives, over the next five months the German chancellor was thrust into a diplomatic minefield created by his predecessor and continued under his watch. Erhard, a diplomatic novice threatened by powerful CDU rivals, strove initially to preserve the Hallstein doctrine while still fulfilling Bonn’s commitments to Israel and to the United States. On the other side, Eshkol, whose predecessor had failed to obtain a written pledge on the weapons deliveries, who was also a diplomatic novice, and who lacked direct access to the German chancellor, faced two urgent issues with Bonn: the looming May 8, 1965, deadline for extending the FRG’s Statute of Limitations and the dispute

74 Schirmer Aufzeichnung, Feb. 24, 1964, AAPD 1964 1:269 72, had expressed astonishment over the Arabs’ silence despite numerous leaks for example, Peres’s statement in the International Herald Tribune, May 25/26, 1963, p. 1, stating FRG’s “major contribution to Israel’s security needs,” but assumed that it was related to the presence of the German rocket scientists in Egypt.
77 Klaus Storkmann, Geheime Solidarität: Militärbeziehungen und Militärhilfen der DDR in die “Dritte Welt” (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2010).
79 Federer to Carstens, Cairo, Oct. 23, 1964, AAPD 1964 2:1182 84.
over removing the German rocket scientists in Egypt. Significantly, Johnson’s landslide victory in the November 3 US elections had stirred momentary hopes – and fears – over a US rapprochement with the new Soviet leadership; but for the moment, it also meant that Washington would remain an active player in the German-Arab-Israeli clash.

Hoping to stave off Arab retaliation, Erhard in late November dispatched the esteemed CDU figure, Bundestag president Eugen Gerstenmaier, on a pacifying mission to Cairo. Gerstenmaier, who delivered an invitation to Nasser to visit the FRG and offered to cancel all arms deliveries, also signaled the Bonn government’s intention to formalize its relations with Israel, which Cairo strongly rejected. Erhard was now caught between Egypt’s demand for an unconditional weapons halt and US pressure to fulfill Bonn’s obligation to Israel, between the growing domestic and international clamor to establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel and the AA’s opposition, and between officials who were devising palliative aid schemes to appease the Arabs and those who opposed purchasing Arab goodwill.

While the German chancellor vacillated for almost two months, Moscow acted. In late December, Soviet deputy prime minister Alexander Shelepin paid a ten-day visit to Cairo offering substantial military and financial aid to Nasser’s cash-strapped government. Then, on January 24, 1965, Bonn was shocked by Nasser’s invitation to the reviled SED chief Walter Ulbricht to visit Egypt: the first ever extended by a non-Communist state to the GDR’s leader.

81 Jelinek, Deutschland und Israel, pp. 450 51; Hindenburg, Demonstrating Reconciliation, p. 136; Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, pp. 662 64.
82 “‘Goldwater ist tot’ ... noch aber lebt der Goldwaterismus,” Die Zeit, Nov. 6, 1964, http://www.zeit.de/1964/45/goldwater ist tot/komplettansicht. To be sure, as the Middle East crisis unfolded, the United States in Feb. and Mar. 1965 also launched a major bombing campaign against North Vietnam and in Mar. dispatched the first US combat troops to South Vietnam.
85 Hansen, Auf dem Schatten, pp. 696 702.
the impending visit as prelude to the establishment of an East German embassy in Cairo, Erhard tried vainly – directly and indirectly – to reverse the invitation.88

In the meantime, with the West German public in an uproar,89 his allies deaf to his plight,90 and Bonn’s enemies mocking his dilemma,91 Erhard took action. On February 12 he announced the end of all arms deliveries and the dispatch of an emissary to Israel to negotiate the financial terms of compensation.92 Although this met with almost unanimous support in the West German press, Israel responded with outrage and attempted to mobilize world public opinion against Bonn’s capitulation to Egyptian blackmail.93

Erhard’s fraught gesture neither satisfied his critics nor convinced Nasser to withdraw the invitation to Ulbricht. And the chancellor, despite a blustering speech before the Bundestag on February 17 threatening to punish Egypt with economic sanctions, hesitated to take stronger steps. After recalling its ambassador from Cairo, the Bonn government glumly witnessed the details of Ulbricht’s red-carpet welcome in Alexandria on February 24 followed by a week of ceremonial occasions ending

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89 The SPD announced a “Diplomatic Stalingrad,” Aumale to MAE Bonn, Feb. 13, 1965, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z206. The *Abendpost*, Feb. 16, wrote that Bonn’s diplomacy had sunk to “absolute zero”; the *Handelsblatt*, Feb. 16, declared, “We have as good as lost the Middle Eastern game on both sides”; the independent *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, Feb. 16, announced that “German dignity and German reputation have sunk in the waters of the Nile”; *Die Zeit*, Feb. 19, lamented being “caught between the pipers of Cairo and Jerusalem,” and *Der Spiegel* complained on Feb. 10 and 24 “the world laughs at Bonn.” Only the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Mar. 8, sided with the government but criticized its errors and vacillation.

on March 2 that did not, however, produce the expected announcement of full-fledged diplomatic relations.94

Nonetheless, Erhard, facing an election in September, was determined to punish what he considered Egypt’s de facto recognition of his eastern neighbor. His government and party, however, were sorely divided over how. Several major CDU figures, including former chancellor Adenauer, called for invoking the Hallstein doctrine and breaking diplomatic relations with Cairo; but Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder feared a chain reaction in which Nasser and his allies would retaliate by establishing diplomatic relations with the GDR. After Bonn’s three principal allies – especially the United States – insisted that in the current tense Cold War climate bad relations with Cairo were better than none at all, Erhard allowed himself to be dissuaded from going it alone.95

There was also a strong division within the cabinet and Erhard’s party over seizing the moment to offer diplomatic relations to Israel, a move that would stem the backlash over the arms halt.96 Not unexpectedly, Adenauer and Strauss were strongly in favor as were two influential CDU parliamentarians newly returned from the United States, Kurt Birrenbach and Rainer Barzel; and, not surprisingly, Schröder and the AA were firmly opposed.97

After several tense cabinet meetings, on Sunday, March 7, Erhard had made his decisions. He would not rupture Bonn’s ties with Egypt but only cancel the impending development loans; and he would offer full diplomatic relations to Israel.98 Constrained from punishing

94 Blasius, “Völkerfreundschaft am Nil,” pp. 767 71; Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, pp. 743 45; Wolfgang and Angelika Bator, eds., Die DDR und die arabischen Staaten (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischer Republik, 1984), pp. 98, 99 100. Nonetheless, after Ulbricht’s visit the GDR intensified its political, economic, cultural, and sport ties with Cairo, which it considered its foremost potential partner in the Arab and non aligned world. Storkmann, Geheime Solidarität, pp. 183 84.


Nasser more forcefully, the harried chancellor sought to restore his government’s plummeting stature by drawing upon the growing public sentiment favoring normal ties with Israel.99 Significantly, there was little pressure on Bonn, neither from Washington (now increasingly absorbed in Vietnam) nor from its key European allies, regarding this decision.100

The Arabs responded at once. There were anti-German demonstrations in major Arab cities, and Egypt summoned an Arab League conference in Cairo. On March 12, 1965, ten governments (Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sudan, and Yemen) announced their intention to withdraw their ambassadors from Bonn, although three (Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) refused to do so. But Bonn was also relieved when Egypt’s attempt to lead the Arabs into a collective recognition of the GDR was blocked by Saudi-led conservatives, leaving open the possibility of regaining the FRG’s place in the Arab world.101

Although Eshkol on March 16 secured a favorable vote in the Knesset on establishing diplomatic ties with Germany, the Israeli public was unenthusiastic. The mainstream press reminded their readers of Bonn’s recent betrayal and displayed only guarded eagerness over ending an anomalous situation. The Herut opposition disparaged the chancellor’s offer as a ploy to “settle accounts . . . with the Egyptian dictator”; but the prime minister’s supporters retorted: “From every practical and contemporary point of view, official relations with Germany are necessary for the strengthening of the state.”102

The secret two-month-long discussions in Israel leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations were difficult and often acrimonious.103 Following its awkward diplomatic predicament earlier in the year the

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99 E.g., Frankfurter Rundschau, Mar. 9, 1965; Süddeutsche Zeitung, Mar. 9, 10. Die Welt, ardently pro Israel, on Mar. 7 scored the “abrupt sacrifice” of the undertaking to Israel “on the altar of German Arab relations,” and on Mar. 16 welcomed the “politically long overdue . . . readjustment of our relationship with Israel.” On the other hand, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Mar. 11, 12, 1965, warned Israel against posing too many “conditions”; Die Zeit, Mar. 19, 1965, regretted the international consequences. Press review in Lavy, Germany and Israel, pp. 121–22.

100 Seydoux to MAE, Mar. 8, 1965, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z206; also Hindenburg, Demonstrating Reconciliation, p. 157; Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, p. 748.


102 Palmer to State Dept., Tel Aviv, Apr. 13, 1965, NARA USDS RG 59 POL 17 GERW. ISR; Press summary in Lavy, Germany and Israel, pp. 117–18; also Hindenburg, Demonstrating Reconciliation, p. 161.

103 Details in Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, pp. 768–93.
Federal Republic was under considerable pressure to produce a positive result, but it was also cautious over making concessions that might drive the Arabs to recognize the GDR. It found a skilled and patient negotiator in Kurt Birrenbach.\textsuperscript{104} Israel’s negotiating team – although weakened by Bonn’s arms cutoff; the impending termination of restitution payments in 1966; and their country’s lesser size, economic power, and level of security – was headed by Eshkol, Deputy Prime Minister Abba Eban, Foreign Minister Golda Meir, and Deputy Defense Minister Peres and was a resolute but also realistic group.\textsuperscript{105} The Israelis were also backed by the US commitment to supply – at German expense – 110 of the withheld tanks.\textsuperscript{106}

On May 13, 1965 – twenty years after the end of World War II – the West German–Israeli negotiations were finally concluded with the issuance of a terse one-sentence announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations.\textsuperscript{107} (That day, seven Arab governments broke their ties with Bonn and three more would follow.) One day earlier, in a solemn ceremony in the Auswärtiges Amt, there had been an official exchange of letters between Erhard and Eshkol that underlined the remaining tension between both sides.\textsuperscript{108} Erhard, reversing his earlier position, had agreed to assume the cost for the undelivered tanks (estimated between DM 100 and 150 million).\textsuperscript{109} He also confirmed the recent extension of the Statute of Limitations until 1969.\textsuperscript{110} He promised to do his utmost to


\textsuperscript{105} By then, Meir had reversed her well known opposition to establishing diplomatic relations with Bonn. Carstens \textit{Aufzeichnung}, Feb. 10, 1965, AAPD 1965 1:289; also Jelinek, \textit{Deutschland und Israel}, pp. 432–33.

\textsuperscript{106} The replacement arrangement had been negotiated during Birrenbach’s trip to Washington: Text of Mar. 10 Memorandum of Understanding; US State Dept. to embassies in Tel Aviv, Bonn, Cairo, Mar. 12, 1965; McGhee to State Dept. Bonn, Mar. 12, 25, 1965 in LBJ NSF Komer Files, Box 33. Schröder \textit{Aufzeichnung}, Mar. 11, 1965, AAPD 1:501 7, on the numerous military equipment details still to be settled.


\textsuperscript{108} Texts of the two letters in \textit{New York Times}, May 14, 1965, p. 3; one day earlier, the letters had been exchanged in a solemn ceremony in the AA. Hansen, \textit{Aus dem Schatten}, pp. 793–94.

\textsuperscript{109} On the diplomatic and financial complications over replacing the tanks and the other weapons: Hansen, \textit{Aus dem Schatten}, pp. 775–79.


Details on the massive US campaign to extend the statute, including public demonstrations, press appeals, protests to the Federal Republic from the presidents of major Jewish organizations, and a message signed by seven thousand Americans of all faiths to the Bundestag: ADL “Germany,” Roll 65; the “shock and indignation” of
remove the remaining German scientists from Egypt, and pledged to enter into discussions on new forms of economic aid to Israel, ending with an expression of hope “for a happier future between our two nations.” Eshkol, on the other hand, used the occasion to remind his new diplomatic partner of their “somber historical background and a stormy political one” as well.

March 1965 marked the beginning of the end of the shadow period between West Germany and Israel during which, as a substitute for formal diplomatic ties, the two countries had become locked in a web of clandestine engagements. Inevitably, as the two countries’ interests diverged, their secret ties became vulnerable to exposure by outside parties.

There were other serious consequences of the absence of formal relations. The missing public dimension intensified the inherently shallow nature of West German–Israeli ties, which were implemented largely by elites. Although strong bonds were established between the two countries’ militaries, their ignored diplomats and financial officials were less involved in, and less favorable to, German–Israeli ties. Moreover, this top-down relationship never received widespread acceptance in the press of the two countries, which had few correspondents on site and continued to present superficial views of each other. Not surprisingly, the two publics, with little contact with a population almost two thousand miles away, also tended to draw on stereotypes, especially the older generation: Germans in their fifties who wished to forget World War II and grumbled over the “blood payments” to Israel, and their Israeli counterparts who saw no difference between Nazis and Erhard’s Germany.

It was also an asymmetric bond that had been intensified by the crisis of 1964–1965. Recoiling from an attack on the pillar of its foreign policy – the insistence on the priority of a single Germany – the Bonn government had virtually dictated the terms of its new relationship with Israel. And once the Federal Republic began to recognize the necessity of revising its

American Jewish leaders over the 4½ year extension expressed in the New York City meeting between Willy Brandt and AJC representatives, Apr. 19, 1965, AJCA “Germany.”

111 The exodus, caused by Israeli threats, a backlash over the Ulbricht visit, and Egypt’s dire financial straits, had already begun (Meyer Lindenburg Aufzeichnung, Jan. 11, 1965, AAPD 1965 1:46, n. 16), although the last ones departed only after the June 1967 war (Hansen, Aus dem Schatten, pp. 662–64).

112 To be sure, the Franco German bond, cultivated by Charles de Gaulle and Adenauer, was similarly shallow and fraught, as witnessed by the widespread public opposition to the 1963 bilateral treaty and, especially, the ongoing debate in government circles between Bonn’s “Atlanticists” and “Gaullists.” Klaus Hildebrand, “‘Atlantiker’ versus ‘Gaullisten’: Zur Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland während der sechziger Jahre,” Revue d’Allemagne 22, no. 4 (Oct. 1990): 583–92.
Cold War shibboleths – including the Hallstein doctrine – in order to pursue a more assertive foreign policy, German interests would begin to take even greater precedence over Israel’s moral, political, and historical claims.\textsuperscript{113}

To be sure, the tragic German-Jewish past, as vividly represented in the Eichmann and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials and in the heated debates over extending the Statute of Limitations, had not disappeared. In the mid-1960s, major German writers of the over-forty generation continued to remind their readers and colleagues of the moral and political perils of simply moving on.\textsuperscript{114}

Nonetheless, for Israel dealing openly and directly with the West German state posed an unfamiliar challenge to the government and public. A growing number of Israeli officials acknowledged the diminishing place of Holocaust consciousness among the new leadership in Bonn\textsuperscript{115} and recognized the necessity – and difficulties – of formulating a new basis of bilateral relations.


\textsuperscript{114} See, esp., Axel Schildt, “Im Visier: Die NS Vergangenheit westdeutscher Intellektuelle,” \textit{Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte} 64, no. 1 (Jan. 2016): 37–68. In his bestseller, \textit{Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?} (Munich: Piper, 1966), which sold sixty thousand copies, the philosopher Karl Jaspers denied that the postwar era was over and warned that the FRG was moving toward another authoritarian dictatorship.

\textsuperscript{115} Jelinek, \textit{Deutschland und Israel}, p. 467.
According to the logical conception of truth, only one of two contraries can be true, but in the reality of life as one lives it they are inseparable.\(^1\)

It was an arduous experience for the ninety-year-old former West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer who, on May 2, 1966, embarked upon his first trip to Israel. Although officially private, the eight-day visit was laden with political and historical content. Shrugging off demonstrations from left- and right-wing Israeli protestors, bomb threats, and even a blow to his face, the elderly statesman sought to assuage his hosts’ sensitivities and to seal his work for German-Israeli reconciliation. Terming his arrival in Israel “one of the most solemn and beautiful moments of my life,” Adenauer visited the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem, delivered an emotional address to the Weizmann Institute of Science in which he praised Israel for having “made this most arid soil fruitful with faith in the future,” and journeyed to Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev to meet with his eighty-year-old former negotiating partner David Ben-Gurion.

But one year after the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, Adenauer’s visit also exposed the underlying tensions between the two nations. At the close of the dinner in the former chancellor’s honor in the prime minister’s residence, Levi Eshkol shocked his guest by announcing that although German-Israeli relations had become “routine,” there had been no atonement for Nazi atrocities and that Israel awaited a sign that Germany “is searching to rejoin the community of nations . . .,” whereupon an outraged Adenauer retorted, “If goodwill is not acknowledged, nothing good can come out of that,” and he threatened to end his visit.\(^2\)


The Cold War Context

For thirteen years, the German–Israeli relationship had been framed not only by the past but also by the Cold War. Both countries belonged to the Western camp, and the United States remained their principal benefactor as well as their advisor, intermediary, and arbiter in almost every aspect of their relationship. The Soviet Union remained each country’s major critic and adversary: the overlord of seventeen million East Germans and some three million Soviet Jews.

But in 1965 the global scene had become more turbulent. Despite calls for détente, the new leadership in the United States and the Soviet Union had stepped up their competition. By the end of 1966 the United States had dispatched almost four hundred thousand soldiers to the Far East and become consumed by a costly, divisive effort to save South Vietnam from a Communist takeover.
The Soviet Union had countered by supplying large amounts of arms, materiel, and military personnel to North Vietnam.  

By the end of 1966, a Great Power confrontation was also brewing in the Middle East. With the United States supporting Israel and the conservative governments in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and the Soviet Union backing the radical regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, an uneasy regional balance had been established. However, a new conflict threatened to erupt, as a result of the increase in Syrian-sponsored Palestinian attacks on Israel and Israel’s forceful responses. The Johnson administration, invoking the Vietnam analogy, likened Syria to North Vietnam and the Palestinian militants to the Viet Cong and considered Israel a solid Cold War partner. The Soviet leadership, hoping to avoid a crisis with the United States, chastised Israel but also urged Damascus to curb the Palestinians.  

By the end of 1966, the Superpowers were also chafing under the strains of their global combat. Each, with their massive nuclear arsenals and ambitious space programs, faced economic and social problems at home and challenges to their leadership abroad – the United States from its NATO partners (particularly France), the Soviet Union from China and Romania, and both of them from the large Third World presence in the United Nations. Nonetheless, in their struggles outside Europe (where they had established a rough stalemate), their Cold War competition persisted. Still hoping to vanquish the other, they eschewed forms of cooperation that would necessitate risky political and diplomatic concessions.

West Germany and Israel: A Season of Discontent

Twenty years after its overwhelming defeat in World War II and its massive material and human losses, Germany in 1965 had undergone a remarkable recovery. The Federal Republic had regained its sovereignty, rebuilt its cities, and integrated millions of refugees from the East; it had also created a modern social market economy at home and


become the world’s third-largest exporter. Advantaged by US defense, aid, trade, and currency policies and firmly integrated into the European Community, the Bonn government had developed into a stable, if conservative, parliamentary democracy.6

Israel too had undergone an extraordinary development. After suffering extremely high casualties and major destruction in the 1948–1949 war, Israel over the next fifteen years had settled some 700,000 Jewish immigrants, and by 1965 its population had almost quadrupled (from 650,000 to 2.5 million). Thanks in large part to West Germany’s reparations, development grants, and payments to individuals, Israel had also created a modern economy along with a robust multi-party democracy.7

But by 1965 the expansive postwar era was ending. Germany’s and Israel’s leaders, Erhard and Eshkol, shared the unenviable position of having succeeded two towering figures who had not only shaped their countries’ founding years but in their retirements had also remained outspoken politicians, not hesitating to heap criticism on their less dynamic successors. Also by the mid-1960s both countries’ political configurations had been transformed. In Germany, the long-standing predominance of the conservative CDU/CSU alignment was now challenged by the SPD, which had shed its Marxist ideology and neutralist stance and was led by the popular West German mayor Willy Brandt. In Israel, the long-dominant Labor bloc Mapai was challenged by the Gahal bloc, a union of non-Socialist parties that had modified many of its ultraconservative goals and was led by the charismatic Herut leader Menachem Begin, who called for Israel’s revitalization through the liberation of the “entire homeland” up to the Jordan River.8 And in both countries, as the larger parties began moving toward the center and shedding their ideological differences, radical left- and right-wing groups became more vocal.9

The first postwar economic crisis in the mid-1960s was a calamity for both countries, which suddenly faced declining growth rates and rising inflation, unemployment, and budget deficits. Both Erhard and Eshkol

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(who had earlier guided their countries’ economic development) advocated austerity measures, including tax hikes in Germany and wage freezes in Israel, which drew heavy opposition from their coalition partners and from the public. Unemployment rose in West Germany to the startling figure of one million, kindling bad memories of the Depression and the fall of the Weimar Republic. In Israel, even higher unemployment and galloping inflation led to laments over the failure of the Zionist project, especially when accompanied by the country’s first massive wave of emigration, which reportedly exceeded the number of new immigrants.10

As elsewhere in the world, the post-1945 baby boom generation had a significant impact on German and Israeli society and not only because of their rock music, long hair, slang, graffiti, and casual sexual mores. By the mid-1960s, a vocal segment of students in West Germany’s overcrowded, unreformed universities, scarred by their elders’ silence over the Nazi past and outraged over America’s war in Vietnam, openly challenged their parents and teachers as well as the government’s authority.11

The youth revolt in Israel, although more restrained, was equally alarming to the establishment. The government had lavished resources on an educational system and on youth movements promoting collectivist Zionist goals, and, in an attempt to curtail “harmful foreign influences,” had resorted to censorship and controls over the media and culture (for example, by the 1965 ban on a Beatles concert);12 but by the mid-1960s politicians, journalists, and intellectuals all voiced concern over the


Erhard’s financial and political troubles were compounded by his failure to obtain a reduction in Bonn’s offset payments to the United States, and Eshkol’s by the end of German reparation payments in 1965, the completion of several major development projects, and widespread rumors of government waste and corruption.


12 Israel had its first television station, a government operated, black and white channel, in 1968.
individualism and materialism of the nation’s adolescents and lamented their ignorance of Israel’s history and their indifference to its welfare.  

Moreover, even among the middle generation there was a rupture in each country’s constructed national identities. Although the Erhard government and its supporters emphasized the Bonn government’s liberal and democratic character, critics pointed to the lingering authoritarianism in the FRG and the presence of former Nazis in high offices as well as in the courts, board rooms, and classrooms, and stressed the need to promote a robust, redemptive republicanism.  

To be sure, much of the German public stood outside this debate, less interested in politics than in material goods.  

Several powerful Israeli national myths were also challenged in the 1960s. Israel’s claims to be a democracy were belied by the wretched status of its Arab population, constituting 12 percent of the entire population, living in conditions of extreme poverty and, until 1966, under martial law.  

Israel’s melting pot narrative was contradicted by the dire social and economic straits of the Mizrahim (Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East living in urban slums and remote settlement towns in the south), whose numbers were nearing those of the dominant Ashkenazim but who still lived as second-class citizens. Israel’s founding socialist ethos was also greatly diminished. Not only had significant changes occurred on many of the kibbutzim (where only some 3.5 percent of the total Jewish population resided), but Israel had also become an increasingly urbanized, bureaucratized, and middle-class society in which the development of science and technology as well as  

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16 In a dramatic sign of independence, Israeli Arabs seceded from Israel’s Communist Party (Maki) in September 1965, forming a separate list (Rakah), winning three seats to the Knesset in the November elections, and becoming the voice of Arab nationalism in Israeli politics.  

17 On these collective farms that had formed the backbone of Zionist ideology, changes in the 1960s included larger living spaces for families, hired workers, and the introduction of commercial managerial techniques.
global trade and finance increasingly took precedence over land-rooted communal values.  

Both in Germany and Israel there was also a split in the national consensus over foreign policy. By the mid-1960s the changes in Europe and in the global environment – the stalemated Cold War and the swift progress of decolonization – stirred a reassessment of Bonn’s obsessive anti-Communism, its global struggle to delegitimize East Germany, and its slavish adherence to US leadership. Similarly in Israel there were increased signs of opposition to the unending struggle with its Arab neighbors and the failure to solve the Palestinian problem. Both countries developed peace movements that protested their large military establishments and their leaders’ efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.

There were nonetheless significant differences behind the foreign policy debates in Germany and Israel. Aside from the considerable disparity in their size, population, and resources as well as their economic and military power, Germany’s borders were secure and Israel’s were not. The FRG was protected by its NATO allies and by the US nuclear shield, whereas Israel, despite its commitment to the free world, had no official diplomatic partners or guarantors. Another major difference related to the past. The Bonn government, braving popular opposition or indifference, had renounced war and promoted reconciliation with the Third Reich’s victims in order to free itself from the past, whereas the Israeli government, with most of the public behind it, still kept Holocaust memory alive in almost every aspect of its diplomacy. However, it had effectively buried the details of the 1947–1949 Israeli-Arab struggle from public discourse.


Taking Up Positions

The commencement of diplomatic ties between Germany and Israel coincided with the expiration of the FRG’s reparation payments and the abrupt termination of its secret military deliveries to Israel. Henceforth, on an official level, the core connection would be channeled through each country’s diplomatic apparatus; further aid to Israel would be voted by the Bundestag; and in the public sphere, there would be an increased level of press and popular scrutiny.

The diplomats in both countries had been unenthusiastic over the decision to establish formal relations. Germany’s foreign minister, Gerhard Schröder (one of Erhard’s major CDU rivals and critics), had been strongly opposed, stressing the damage to Bonn’s ties with the Arab world and the risk of the GDR’s exploiting the rupture. Moreover, the Auswärtiges Amt, which had been excluded from the negotiations (and whose personnel included numerous holdovers from the Third Reich with long-term Middle Eastern connections) was decidedly cool toward Bonn’s new diplomatic partner.

There were similarly negative sentiments in Jerusalem, where the anti-German Foreign Minister Golda Meir had bowed to practical necessity. Her hitherto ignored foreign policy experts, already leery of dealing with former Nazis, faced an uphill struggle with a far stronger government intent on eroding the past.

Because of the hurried nature of the negotiations, the two governments had to choose temporary sites for the new embassies and the physical arrangements were quite different. Germany, refusing Israel’s pleas to locate in Jerusalem, temporarily rented a heavily guarded space on the upper floors of Israel’s first luxury beachfront hotel, the Tel Aviv Sheraton. The Israeli emissaries, on the other hand, were able to occupy

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25 Special arrangements for the German envoys included the placement of machine guns on the hotel roof, 24 hour police guards, and detectives patrolling the premises
the offices of their government’s Purchasing Mission in Cologne, which for twelve years had functioned as an informal embassy.\textsuperscript{26}

Unsurprisingly, the selection of ambassadors raised tensions between the two sides. The Israelis had hoped for a negotiating partner linked to the era of atonement and compensation (for example, Kurt Birrenbach or Franz Böhm) or a younger man without a Nazi past. Instead, the \textit{Auswärtiges Amt}, over the objections of Erhard – who preferred a major German cultural figure – nominated Dr. Rolf Pauls, a fifty-year-old career diplomat but also a former Wehrmacht officer, who had served in Russia (where he had lost his left arm), Italy, and France, where he received the Knight’s Cross, Germany’s highest military honor.\textsuperscript{27}

Even more controversial was the appointment of Pauls’s second in command, Dr. Alexander Török, a former Hungarian diplomat who had served in his country’s Berlin embassy in 1944 and had entered the FRG’s Foreign Service as a naturalized citizen in 1950. After a Hungarian journalist accused Török of membership in the fascist Arrow Cross and complicity in the deportation of Hungarian Jews, the Israeli press seethed with outrage, whereupon the \textit{Auswärtiges Amt} recalled Török and launched a seven-month investigation before dismissing the charges.\textsuperscript{28}

Israel, in return for its acceptance of Pauls, proposed an equally disquieting candidate to the Germans. After several Israeli diplomats, academics, and intellectuals turned down the position, the foreign ministry nominated Asher carrying submachine guns and walkie talkie radios, accompanied by police dogs. \textit{Jewish Telegraph Agency}, Aug. 9, 1965. The ambassador was to be guarded by an Israel security [Shin Bet] officer. On the Sheraton, which combined European amenities with a Middle Eastern flavor and kosher catering, “Israel Rolls Out the Carpet for a New Hotel,” \textit{New York Times}, Mar. 12, 1961, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{26} Although its main function had been the purchase of German goods covered by the Restitution Agreement, the mission’s personnel, whom Bonn had granted diplomatic immunity and treated as official envoys, had issued visas, issued statements to the German media, and reported to Jerusalem on political developments in the FRG. Felix Shinnar, \textit{Bericht eines Beauftragten: Die deutsch israelischen Beziehungen, 1951 1966} (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1967).

\textsuperscript{27} On Pauls’s appointment: Conze et al., \textit{Das Amt und die Vergangenheit}, pp. 500 2. Pauls had not been a member of the Nazi party, and there was also some evidence of his participation in the German Resistance. Details in Dunnigan to State Department, Tel Aviv, June 9, 1965, Palmer to State Department, Tel Aviv, June 11, 1965, Barbour to State Department, July 9, 1965, NARA USDS RG 59 Pol 17 Germ W Isr. In his capacity as a subdivision head of the AA’s Department of Commercial and Development policy, Pauls had accompanied Birrenbach on his third and final trip to Israel preceding the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Ben-Natan, the Vienna-born forty-four-year-old former state secretary in the defense ministry who had negotiated the FRG’s secret arms deliveries and was therefore likely to raise Arab suspicions and feed GDR propaganda over a resumption of military ties between the two countries. Moreover, Ben-Natan’s earlier roles as the Vienna-based commander of briha (the postwar rescue organization that had brought Holocaust survivors to Palestine) and as an intelligence operative who had aided the capture of Adolf Eichmann could raise German suspicions of an “avenging angel.”

By July, both governments had reluctantly accepted the nominations. Nonetheless, the objections that had been expressed privately and publicly, the grudging bargain that had been struck, and the delay of their arrivals until late summer all cast a shadow over both ambassadors’ reception.

Pauls had anticipated the challenges of his difficult and potentially dangerous post. On his arrival on August 11, 1965, he was greeted by some sixty protestors, one holding a placard with the word “Nazi!” In his first official statement at the airport, delivered in English, Pauls stressed not only the “terrible past which we should not forget for one moment” but also his conviction that “Jews and Germans are going to have a future too.” Two days later in Tel Aviv some five thousand Israeli protestors responded, displaying placards saying “Unwelcome,” and “No friendship between Germans and Jews.”

Pauls’s official reception in Jerusalem was strained. Before his first interview with Golda Meir, the new ambassador visited Yad Vashem and laid a wreath for the victims of German genocide. His conversation with the Israeli foreign minister opened with his acknowledgment of the immense suffering of the Jewish people at Germany’s hands before he moved on briskly to current topics. During the formal presentation of his credentials on August 19 to President Zalman Shazar, Pauls again admitted his country’s “hideous crimes” but also praised the patient work of “persons of good will” who had laid the groundwork for reconciliation. Shazar responded, “May the spirit of that accursed time never be born again.”

Pauls’s efforts to represent the new and the penitent Germany were sharply rebutted. Thousands of demonstrators had assembled outside the presidential residence, emitting loud protests over the playing of the German national anthem and the display of the German flag and interrupting the proceedings with their shouts. After the demonstrators began throwing objects and threatening the guards, local authorities summoned riot police and Pauls made a hasty departure for Tel Aviv under a rain of projectiles, cries, and posters demanding a “German-free Israel.”

An outraged Pauls refused to condone the violence. In his protest message to Eshkol, he also complained of the prime minister’s expressions of sympathy with the rioters, which could only encourage more unacceptable outbursts. In an interview with the Jerusalem Post, Pauls warned the Israeli public that “stones, bottles, and false accusations” were not appropriate ways to greet a new ambassador. Nonetheless, for the next few months the German emissary withdrew from the public eye, limiting himself to official duties and restricting his personal contacts to small congenial groups.

34 Pauls to AA, Aug. 23, 1965, ibid.
And rather than attempting to win Israeli hearts and minds, Pauls devoted himself to promoting stronger “unemotional” economic ties between the two countries by encouraging German firms to trade with and invest in Israel. Indeed, this was precisely what his government had in mind: to forge a “country-to-country, and not a people-to-people relationship,” as befitted a normal tie.

Ben-Natan arrived on West German soil with a different mission. He intended to uphold the special element of German–Israeli relations: to invoke the tragic German-Jewish past as much as possible in order to build a link between the two governments and peoples. Speaking in German before a crowd of officials and journalists at the Cologne airport on August 16, Ben-Natan called for peace, understanding, and a shared future. His first meeting with Schröder was brief and formal. At the presentation of his credentials, which was given wide press and television coverage (although Schröder and Federal President Heinrich Lübke were both notably absent), Ben-Natan linked the Holocaust with lofty goals, among them strengthening Israel’s bonds with Germany and all of Europe and working with all peoples in the pursuit of “peace, freedom, and justice.”

Shrugging off his cool official reception, Ben-Natan immediately became an indefatigable spokesman for his country, giving numerous lectures and interviews, appearing on radio and television talk shows, and answering thousands of letters from ordinary German citizens. Overcoming his personal misgivings over dealing with the Germans, Ben-Natan – in contrast to the austere Pauls – adopted a cordial, outgoing mien and his fluency in German helped. He used tact in discussing the past with German audiences and handled delicate questions with caution and occasional humor. The Israeli ambassador also built strong bonds with the still small, local Jewish communities and organizations but resolutely shunned contacts with former Nazis.

38 The selections in Asher Ben Natan, ed., Briefe an den Botschafter (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1971) provide a mirror of contemporary German attitudes.
39 Ben Natan and his family had fled Nazi occupied Vienna for Palestine in 1938; and his wife Erika, who had lost her mother and sister in the Holocaust, until that time like many Israelis had refused to speak German and shunned any contact with Germans. Asher Ben Natan, Die Chuzpe zu leben (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003), p. 118.
40 Ben Natan, Brücken bauen, pp. 54 74.
Ben-Natan’s campaign to win friends for Israel was reinforced by several important developments. The conservative newspaper Die Welt already had a full-time correspondent in Israel, and in February 1966 the ARD network established a television bureau in Tel Aviv, which for the first time brought images of ordinary Israelis to large German audiences. The ambassador promoted tourism and in the year of his arrival some ten thousand Germans visited Israel. Another important link was the establishment in March 1966 of the German–Israeli Association [Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft/DIG]. With its headquarters in Bonn, this nongovernmental organization of influential politicians, businessmen, journalists, and religious officials promoted closer political, social, and cultural ties between the two countries through extensive information programs, lobbying, and establishing local chapters throughout the Federal Republic. Another connection was through the two countries’ trade union banks: the collaboration between the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft (BfG) and the Israeli Bank Hapoalim.

Also important was the personal link Ben-Natan helped to establish between the media magnate Axel Springer and Israel. In late June 1966, the fifty-four-year-old Springer, who controlled some 40 percent of the West German press as well as a major publishing house, arrived for the first time in Israel on his private plane for ostensibly a business trip, but he also had another mission in mind. The staunch German nationalist and pro-American Cold Warrior (who was about to move his business headquarters next to the Wall in West Berlin) was a fervent admirer of Israel, and he reacted emotionally to the barriers, minefields, and deserted border streets of a divided Jerusalem, which he compared with Berlin’s. Springer struck up a close friendship with the city’s Viennese-born Mayor Teddy Kollek (who was the same age as he); and after receiving several proposals he offered a $1 million donation for the construction of a library for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Henceforth, for rest of his life, with his generous gifts, annual visits, and acquisition of a residence in

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42 Details in Jekutiel Deligdisch, *Die Einstellung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zum Staate Israel* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1974), pp. 120–22.

Jerusalem, Springer espoused a personal mission to aid Israel with generous political as well as financial support.44

The Period of Adjustment

The new framework of German–Israeli relations would include a fundamental change. Erhard, in the negotiations with the Israelis over diplomatic recognition, had insisted not only in ending all covert arms deliveries but also on setting their economic ties on a more normal footing.45

Behind Bonn’s initiative were several considerations, both domestic and international. Erhard, like a growing number of his compatriots, was intent on removing Israel from a privileged category of aid recipients because of the German-Jewish past. He was determined to replace vague understandings, informal practices, and open-ended commitments with standard, transparent procedures—in short, to place all future agreements under the specifications of FRG’s new foreign assistance program to underdeveloped countries, which entailed official project submissions, annual audits, and approval by the Bundestag. On the diplomatic level, the Auswärtiges Amt insisted that its efforts to repair Bonn’s rupture with the Arab world—and to prevent Arab leaders from scurrying toward Communist trading partners and investors—would depend on a more publicly evenhanded treatment of Israel. German exporters concurred, convinced that this new direction would facilitate their growing ties with all parties in the Middle East. Finally, Bonn envisaged using its economic leverage to attain greater political influence abroad—for example, using its


economic concessions to win Israel’s support for its diplomatic goals in the UN and elsewhere.46

The negotiations were delayed until February 23, 1966, because of the November 1965 elections in Israel and Eshkol’s two-month-long labors to form a new cabinet.47 In the meantime, Meir had been replaced as foreign minister by Abba Eban, the fifty-one-year-old, South African-born diplomat and long-time Israeli representative at the UN, whose appointment signaled a more active direction of Israeli diplomacy.48

The first official German–Israeli talks since 1952 were conducted over a round table in the Auswärtiges Amt, pitting Ben-Natan and his team against a group headed by the fifty-eight-year-old State Secretary Rolf Otto Lahr, a seasoned veteran of the FRG’s difficult (and successful) negotiations with France, the Soviet Union, and the Common Market and known for his “snappy-guy” [schmissiger Kerl] manner.49 Lahr, like many of his foreign ministry colleagues, had once served the Third Reich and had opposed Erhard’s decision in 1965 to risk Arab retaliation by recognizing Israel – thus adding a dose of prickliness to these negotiations.50

As expected, the discussions broke off several times.51 The Israelis argued forcefully for maintaining their special status, the Germans denied the validity of the Adenauer/Ben-Gurion agreement, and each complained to outsiders about the other’s attitudes and behavior. During one of the pauses, their debates – echoed in political speeches and press commentary – stirred wild speculation over the terms and the figures, elicited awkward attempts at “clarification” from Adenauer and Ben-Gurion, and incited the critics of German–Israeli reconciliation.52

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47 In the meantime, owing in part to US pressure on Bonn, Ben Natan had secured the final DM 75 million loan under the old agreement. Ben Natan, Brücken bauen, pp. 75 76.
50 Ben Natan, Brücken bauen, pp. 75 76; Rolf Lahr, Zeuge von Fall und Aufstieg: Private Briefe, 1934 1974 (Hamburg: Knaus, 1981), pp. 419 420, 441 42. Lahr, a former NSDAP and SA member, had joined the Third Reich’s Economics Ministry in 1934 (to which he returned in 1937 after a brief stint on the board of the Reichsgruppe Industrie), served after 1942 in the Wehrmacht’s anti tank division in the East (rising to lieutenant), and, after undergoing postwar denazification proceedings, had worked in the bizonal Economics Council before reentering the Economics Ministry in 1949 and the Auswärtiges Amt in 1953. Lahr, Zeuge von Fall und Aufstieg, pp. 14 194.
51 Duck to FO, Bonn, Mar. 1, 9, 1966, GB NA FO 371 E186846. Britain, a major trading partner with Israel, had considerable interest in these talks.
52 McGhee to State Dept. May 11, 1966, USNA USDS RG 59 POL 17 GERW ISR; also Ben Natan, Brücken bauen, pp. 76 78.
Recognizing the political risks of failure, the negotiators returned to the table, and an agreement was finally signed on May 12, 1966, the first anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and Israel. The Germans had achieved their goal of loosening the bonds with the past: They had ended the Adenauer/Ben-Gurion accord and refused Israel’s demand to expand restitution payments beyond the terms of the 1952 agreement. But the Israelis, who won on several points, had set their mark on the future. The terms agreed upon were certainly more generous than those accorded to Bonn’s other foreign aid recipients: For 1966, Israel would receive DM 160 million, at an interest rate not to exceed 3 percent, with payments over twenty-five years and a seven-year grace period.53 In practice, Israel’s loan requests would be subject to “simplified and abbreviated procedures,” and it would continue to enjoy extraordinary flexibility in the expenditure of almost two-thirds of its loans.54 All of these funds, to be allocated for transportation, housing, and infrastructure, had to be used for purchases in the Federal Republic or West Berlin, thus subsidizing, especially, smaller German industries. Finally, although the loans would have to be negotiated annually (a stipulation that drew heavy criticism from the Israeli press), the text’s reference to “continuous cooperation” implied that the FRG’s support would be maintained for an indefinite period.55

Those who had hoped the conclusion of the German–Israeli economic agreement would improve the relationship were quickly disappointed. Indeed, the atmosphere during the next three months could almost be described as toxic. On the eve of the accord, the earlier-cited contretemps in Jerusalem between Eshkol and Adenauer revealed the gap between the two countries’ views, with Israel insisting on the dominance of the past in its relations with Bonn, and the Germans indignant over Israel’s hectoring tone and the absence of gratitude for their considerable generosity.56

Moreover, the Germans had become increasingly resentful over Israel’s indifference to their goal of “national self-determination” (i.e., German unification). According to Török, Israeli elites strongly favored the status

55 This was, to be sure, a contested point. German officials were not empowered to make long term commitments to foreign governments, and in their reports to the cabinet on May 11, Schröder and Lahr insisted that Israel had received no guarantee of future payments. Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, vol. 19 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), pp. 202 5; nonetheless, Ben Natan (Brücken bauen, p. 81) maintained that an understanding had been reached, and indeed these payments continued for thirty years.
56 Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, June 29, 1966, PA AA B36/238.
quo in Central Europe; indeed, most Israelis, untroubled by the Berlin Wall, viewed Germany’s division “much too mild a punishment” for the Nazis’ crimes and the FRG’s remarkable economic recovery as a perverse development.\textsuperscript{57} Pauls, mistrustful of Eskhol’s “left-leaning government,” warily reported its attempts to draw closer to the USSR in order to facilitate the emigration of Soviet Jewry. This initiative set off an alarm – noted also by Britain and the United States – that Moscow might exert pressure on Israel to “get nasty with Bonn.”\textsuperscript{58}

Then came the bombshell: Only one day after the announcement of the German–Israeli economic agreement, Eshkol confirmed his endorsement of the Oder-Neisse line, the Soviet-supported boundary between Germany and Poland. Pauls (who, on the eve of Eban’s trip to Poland, had warned against such a gesture),\textsuperscript{59} delivered an official protest; the German press erupted in outrage; and opposition deputies in the Bundestag mocked the Erhard government for lavishing support on a foe of one of the FRG’s most important border claims.\textsuperscript{60}

On the Israeli side, there was an outcry over political events in Germany. The press spread alarm over the rise of the National Democratic Party (NPD). Founded in 1964 by right-wing activists (including former Nazis) and denouncing Germany’s subjugation to Soviet and US hegemony, the NPD, drawing mainly on middle-class voters in small towns and rural areas, had polled a startling 664,000 votes in the 1965 national elections and gathered some 23,000 members.\textsuperscript{61} Israelis were also disturbed over mounting antisemitic incidents, including vandalized schools and synagogues and grave desecrations, throughout Germany.\textsuperscript{62}

At the end of June 1966, Pauls had lost patience with the anti-German environment. The Israeli government continued to censor films from the FRG, banned performances of Wagner’s music, and discouraged travel to

\textsuperscript{57} Török to AA, Tel Aviv, Aug. 15, 1966, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Levavi to Ben Natan, Jerusalem, May 6, 1966, ISA 130 4011/20.
\textsuperscript{60} Pauls to AA Tel Aviv, May 18, 1966, PA AA B36/238, May 20, 1966, ibid., B36/241; Ben Natan to FM, Bonn, June 21, 1966, ISA 130 4011/8.
Germany. The ambassador decided to issue a public response to Israeli criticisms of his country, driven, he believed, by a small right-wing fringe.63

Speaking before the international trade fair in Tel Aviv, Pauls praised his hosts for their many social and economic accomplishments, but he also issued a blunt rebuke to those who “for reasons of political advantage or out of selfish motives” had constantly stirred up the past in order to “disturb the present and the future.” He complained of the Israeli press’s tendency to depict the Federal Republic as a Nazi state. He rejected Eshkol and Eban’s line that the Jewish people “awaited deeds” from Germany to admit it back into the family of nations, insisting that his country already occupied a respected place in the world and required no “special authorization.” In closing, Pauls warned Israel’s leaders and people that their bilateral ties would only improve when their relations were governed “not by the past but by the future” and that they would also depend on Israel’s attitude toward German interests.64

Pauls’s speech created an uproar in the Israeli media. However, cooler heads – Ben-Natan, Eban, and even Meir – came to the ambassador’s defense. Pauls’s remarks also drew support from Nahum Goldmann, the seventy-one-year-old president of the World Jewish Congress (and former negotiator of the 1952 Restitution Agreement) who lauded Germany for its generosity and castigated the “viperous” Israeli press for attempting to sabotage relations between Bonn and Jerusalem.65

The German side reacted calmly to the incident. The press lauded Pauls’s “necessary” remarks, and the Bonn government fully backed the ambassador. Nonetheless, the Auswärtiges Amt acknowledged a serious “deterioration” in German–Israeli relations.66 By adding new personal elements to the struggle between past and future, the summer’s verbal pyrotechnics had created another neuralgic point between their two countries.

63 Pauls’s text had been cleared with the Auswärtiges Amt, but not with Erhard, in PA AA B346/240.
64 “Bonn Envoy, Long Silent, Replies to Israeli Critics,” New York Times, July 7, 1966. Pauls’s warning was reinforced one month later by Helmut Schmidt, leader of the SPD’s parliamentary group, who cautioned his Israeli interlocutors against “sacrificing West Germany’s…interests without regard to the consequences.” Pauls to AA, July 26, 1966, PA AA B36/239; cf. FM to Embassy Bonn, Tel Aviv, July 27, 1966, ISA PM 7229/10.
65 Aspin to FO, July 7, 1966, GB NA FO371 E186810; Ben Natan to FM Cologne, July 6, 1966, ISA 130 4011/5; D’Aumale to Couve de Murville, Bad Godesberg, July 11, 1966, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z209; also Ben Natan, Brücken bauen, pp. 84 85.
66 Unsigned tel. to FM, Cologne, July 24, 1966, ISA PM 7229/10; Ben Natan to FM, ISA 130 4011/8.
Enter the Grand Coalition

Ludwig Erhard’s rocky three-year chancellorship ended abruptly on December 1, 1966, brought down by party rivals, a refractory coalition partner, the shock of the NPD’s victories in the Länder elections, and especially by his government’s inability to alleviate the country’s first economic crisis. Erhard had also suffered major diplomatic setbacks – the Soviet Union’s rebuff of his peace overtures, the United States’ insistence on higher offset payments, and France’s growing estrangement from Bonn. The rupture with the Arabs in 1965 and the tensions with Israel had undoubtedly contributed to Erhard’s political demise.

To tackle the domestic emergency, Germany’s two largest parties, the CDU/CSU alignment and the Social Democrats formed a Grand Coalition, an unprecedented development in the FRG’s history and one that raised considerable displeasure within the German left. The new chancellor was the sixty-two-year-old CDU politician Kurt-Georg Kiesinger, who had served for twelve years as minister-president of Baden-Württemberg, and the vice chancellor and foreign minister was Willy Brandt. Kiesinger’s appointment raised a temporary storm

71 Pulzer, German Politics, 1945 1995, p. 75.
abroad because of his former membership in the Nazi party (he had joined in February 1933) and his service during World War II as liaison between the *Auswärtiges Amt* and Goebbels’s Propaganda Ministry.\(^73\)

It was quickly evident that this new government intended not only to tackle serious domestic problems but also to revitalize Bonn’s foreign policy. Washington faced the prospect of a more assertive NATO ally,\(^74\) Moscow braced for stronger German initiatives to ease tensions in Central Europe,\(^75\) and both powers had to accept their inability to control the FRG’s internal politics.

For Israel, the prospects were particularly alarming.\(^76\) Although Brandt, the former West German mayor and anti-Nazi exile, was regarded as a sympathetic figure, it was clear that Bonn now intended to pursue a far more active role in European and global politics, not only seeking détente in Europe but also pursuing a more “balanced” policy in the Middle East.\(^77\) At the close of his inaugural address to the Bundestag on December 13, Kiesinger voiced his government’s aim of repairing Germany’s severed ties with the ten Arab governments that had broken off relations. And only after acknowledging the “problematic and difficult” relations between Germany and Israel did the new chancellor express hopes for an improved future between them.\(^78\)

By 1966 the stereotyped views of the other – of an aggressive, nationalist Germany and a victimized Jewish people who had achieved statehood in Israel – were disappearing in the wake of the Bonn government’s new peace initiatives and the Jerusalem government’s growing military prowess. Moreover, for the postwar generation of Germans, chafing under their elders’ control at home and an expanding Cold War abroad, a connection to the Third Reich was becoming increasingly distant.

\(^77\) Bonn correspondent Deutschkron in *Ma‘ariv*, Dec. 9, 1966; also Idan to FM, Cologne, Dec. 12, 1966, ISA 130 4011/8.
3 Upheaval

Do something. Do something.
We must do something or other,
... I’m full of rage.¹

The days of almost unquestioning sympathy for the
Israeli cause seem to have passed for good.²

On March 9, 1967, the thirty-nine-year-old German novelist, poet, and artist Günter Grass began an eventful two-week visit to Israel as a guest of its government – one of the first German cultural figures to arrive since the end of World War II.³ Author of the best-selling novel The Tin Drum – the long narrative of an amoral dwarf depicting the savagery of the Third Reich and the vacuousness of postwar West Germany’s “Economic Miracle” – Grass was greatly admired by German youth and praised abroad as a fresh and unrelenting anti-Nazi voice.⁴

At the time Grass was also a fervent SPD activist whose announced purpose was to “dispel prejudices”: to hear Israeli concerns and provide assurances of the

⁴ On April 14, 1964, Zachariah Schuster, the American Jewish Committee’s representative in Paris, had characterized Grass as a highly credible West German figure (“kosher le pesach”): “too young . . . , too much of an individualist, too much of a person of real substance to have followed uniformed or even ideological Nazism.” AJC records, YIVO, RG347.3.1 Box 25 FAD 59–65.

However, this long standing image was dramatically overturned when at the end of his eighth decade (and seven years after he had belatedly received the Nobel Prize in Literature), Grass, in his memoir, Beim Häuten der Zwiebel (Göttingen: Steidel, 2006), revealed his youthful enthusiasm for the NSDAP and membership in the Waffen SS.
new Bonn government’s support. He met with Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Foreign Minister Abba Eban, and President Zalman Shazar and held extended conversations with Zeev Shek, director of the foreign ministry’s West European section, who accompanied him on his travels.5

Speaking in German — a first for a foreign artist — Grass in his radio interview and his talks in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem stressed the importance of reconciliation between their two peoples and was warmly received by Israelis. But in an informal address on March 20, Grass went a step further, urging a Hebrew University student audience to replace “emotion” with “rationality”: to situate the murder of European Jewry in the context of other historical atrocities, among them the slaughter of North America’s Native population, and, more recently, Stalin’s dekulakization in Ukraine, the recent massacres in Indonesia, and the US carnage in Vietnam, and he compared US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara with Adolf Eichmann.6

Defying the protests of their German-Jewish colleagues, the Israeli Writers’ Association refused to welcome Grass in their midst.7 In a long and thoughtful essay, the renowned Israeli poet Natan Alterman defended this decision, denouncing Grass’s “trivialization” of the Holocaust as “another mass genocide” and refusing to accord any special merit to the writer’s anti-Nazi professions.8

Grass, on his return, reported to Brandt that an “influential part” of the Israeli public was prepared for “an open and critical dialogue with the Federal Republic.”9 However, Alterman, although acknowledging that this was no longer the “Germany of Goebbels,” implored his fellow citizens to reject any form of “normalization” of Israel’s ties with Bonn.10

1967: A Turbulent Year

In its first issue of 1968, the New York Times called the preceding year “horrific.” During the previous two decades the Superpowers had managed to maintain a tense international balance and had also kept control over events in the Third World. But order broke down in 1967: a year of exceptional global violence above which loomed the ever-present – and now expanding – nuclear cloud.

Nature dealt powerful blows in 1967, with devastating fires, floods, tornadoes, landslides, earthquakes, and even volcanic eruptions. Technology also took its toll; on March 18 the oil tanker Torrey Canyon ran aground off Land’s End, England, creating an ecological disaster. The race for space was set back when on January 27 three US astronauts died after fire enveloped their space capsule on the launch pad, and in April when the first Soviet cosmonaut died after his parachute failed to open. More than ever before, a great part of the world learned quickly of these calamities over the radio, on television, or in the press.

Political events in 1967 were equally disquieting. In April, the Greek military seized power in what was widely (but incorrectly) believed to be an American-sponsored coup that resulted in the next seven years in a brutal, repressive regime and an incompetent US NATO ally as well as a major target of left-wing European protests. On June 1 Communist China shook the international scene with the explosion of its first hydrogen bomb, causing the Soviet Union to dispatch thousands of troops to its eastern border and raising an alarm in the United States that Beijing could soon attack Los Angeles.

The two major wars of 1967 produced extremely high casualties. In Vietnam, now occupied by a half million American soldiers, the results of the heightened US ground offensives and the B-52 bombings of North Vietnam were the deaths of 9,400 Americans, 12,000 South Vietnamese, 800 other Allied troops, and 80,000 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers – as well as 4,000 civilians. The June 1967 Israeli-Arab War resulted in some 900 Israeli, 1,000 Syrian, 6,000 Jordanian, and 9,000 Egyptian deaths, thousands more injured, and hundreds in captivity. The year 1967 also witnessed horrific internal and civil wars. In China, where Mao had just unleashed the Cultural Revolution, some 10,000 people lost their lives between January and December. In July, the Nigerian government’s invasion of Biafra to head off its secession had led to the loss of more than 10,000 soldier and civilian lives in the first five months. Moreover, in Zaire a military revolt claimed thousands of lives.

Two killings in 1967 also had major consequences. On June 2, the death of the twenty-six-year-old student Beno Ohnesorg, shot in the back of the head by a West Berlin police officer during a protest against the visit of the Shah of Iran, set off a wave of demonstrations throughout the country against police brutality and also became the rallying cry for the

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11 On November 6, Super Typhoon Emma left 300 dead and 140,000 people homeless in the Philippines; and that year flash floods in Kobe, Japan, killed 517 people and in Lisbon, Portugal, led to 462 deaths.
creation of the armed Red Army Faction. Only four months later in Bolivia, on October 9, the thirty-nine-year-old Argentinean doctor Ernesto “Che” Guevara was assassinated by CIA-aided troops, setting off tremors in Latin America and Europe and becoming an iconic image for global rebels.

Urban violence also marked 1967. In the United States during the scorching months of June and July, race riots broke out in eight major cities, including Washington, DC. In Newark between July 12 and 17, twenty-six people died and more than a hundred were injured, and in Detroit, in the second-worst riot in US history, forty-three people died, almost five hundred were injured, and two thousand buildings were destroyed by fire, leaving that city forever scarred.

Young people took to the streets in unprecedented numbers. In France, Italy, West Germany, Japan, and Australia, the burgeoning student generation protested against authoritarian state educational systems. Risking police and army repression, Czech students organized a candlelit march, Spanish students and workers demonstrated against the Franco regime, and Ethiopian students protested Haile Sellassie’s US-supported military dictatorship.

Opposition to the Vietnam War underlay most of the demonstrations in 1967. In April 1967, the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King led a march of some 250,000 people from New York City’s Central Park to the UN headquarters, and in October tens of thousands of antiwar demonstrators assembled before the Pentagon in Washington. There were also mass protests throughout the world.

The antiwar movement was closely tied to anticolonialism. By 1967, the UN General Assembly was dominated by a well-organized and vocal African, Asian, and Latin American majority determined to end the vestiges of Western imperialism. And for much of the world’s newly

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12 According to information found in 2009 in the Stasi archives, Ohnesorg’s killer, Karl Heinz Kurras, was actually a Stasi agent; Der Spiegel (May 22, 2009); further investigation has also revealed that the West Berlin police had stifled evidence that the shooting had been a deliberate murder and not an act of self defense. ibid., Jan. 22, 2012.

13 In Hong Kong, a May 6 clash between striking workers and the police left fifty one people dead. In Turkey, a soccer riot in Sivas ended with forty one dead. In New Zealand, the “Maori Affairs Amendment” involving a major confiscation of indigenous lands set off widespread protests and brutal police responses. In Indonesia, a peaceful demonstration by Chinese citizens against the discriminatory edicts of the new US backed Suharto dictatorship (which, in the two previous years, had already slaughtered some half million people) ended in nine deaths, among them a twelve year old.

14 In 1967, the UN Human Rights Commission, after being stalled for two decades by Superpower objections to any form of interference in their domestic affairs, suddenly sprang to life and began examining violations of the 1948 Universal Declaration in Rhodesia, South Africa, and Namibia.
mobilized youth, the global competition between Western capitalism and Soviet Communism had become far less critical than the Third World’s struggle for independence or for freedom from indirect Great Power political and economic control. For the New Left activists of the 1960s, the old liberal-Marxist debate had become antiquated: Armed revolutionaries became their popular heroes, and in their programs Vietnamese, Black South Africans, and Palestinians replaced the working classes as the Cold War’s primary victims.¹⁵

A sizable and vocal protest movement had emerged in West Germany, led by left-wing academics, journalists, writers, and politicians who found a ready audience among the republic’s youthful population that had flooded the high schools and universities.¹⁶ In the media and their publications, they condemned their elders’ silence over the Nazi past, criticized Adenauer’s “chancellor democracy” (Kanzlerdemokratie) and the FRG’s stultified institutions, and challenged the government’s hard-line Cold War foreign policy, especially toward the ostracized GDR, still officially labeled the Soviet-Occupied Zone (SBZ).

After the formation of the Grand Coalition at the end of 1966, anger mounted against the republic’s political paralysis and the threat to democracy.¹⁷ Günter Grass deplored the SPD’s loss of “conscience” in aligning itself with the CDU/CSU; and from his Basel exile the philosopher Karl Jaspers termed Kiesinger’s leadership not only an “affront to the outside world” but also an “insult” to the German minority who had opposed National Socialism.¹⁸ On the radical fringes the student left in 1967 created the extra parliamentary opposition (Außerparlamentarische Opposition, APO) to protest a government that controlled 90 percent of the votes in parliament and it called for a “revolution” in West German politics and society. On the extreme right the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) shocked the country and the world with its

¹⁶ As a result of heavy wartime casualties on the one hand and the postwar baby boom on the other, the Federal Republic had a dramatically inverted population pyramid. According to the 1961 census, of a total population of 56,175, 37 percent of the population was under age 25; 49 percent between 25 and 65; and only 14 percent over 65. By 1965 there were some 384,000 students in West Germany. Gerd Roellecke, “Entwicklungslinien deutscher Universitätsgeschichte,” Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B 34 (Jan. 21, 1984): 3–10.
¹⁷ Exceptionally pessimistic report on German political conditions in Jerry Goodman to Max Horkheimer, April 12, 1967, YIVO Records of the American Jewish Committee RG 347.7.1, Box 21 AJC FAD 1.
electoral victories in Hesse in 1966 and in Bremen, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Schleswig-Holstein in 1967, and its leaders derided the Great Coalition for its obeisance toward the Western powers.\(^\text{19}\)

Israel had a far smaller and less mobilized population. Although its post–World War II baby boom had produced a swell of high school and university students in the 1960s, the country’s economic fragility, its precarious security situation, and its heterogeneous population tended to stifle an organized social and political opposition.\(^\text{20}\)

By the mid-1960s, social and political change also came to Israel with the end of the long Ben-Gurion era of Labor Party “statism” (Mamlachtiyut), of extensive government control over the Israeli economy, society, and private life. There were growing debates among the founders’ generation over the state’s future, spurred by the slowdown in immigration, rising numbers of Israel’s Mizrahi population, and fears that the country would turn inward and abandon its Western character.\(^\text{21}\)

Among the younger, eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old generation, a few dissenting voices were raised. Some writers had begun to challenge Labor Zionism’s collectivist values as well as their government’s treatment of Israel’s Arab citizens;\(^\text{22}\) and despite widespread respect for the national army’s role in forging Israel’s national identity, a small number of Israelis resisted military service on grounds of conscientious objection.\(^\text{23}\)

**West Germany and Israel**

Germany’s Grand Coalition unveiled an ambitious agenda in 1967. Abroad, it was committed to launching a *Neue Ostpolitik* aimed at


\(^{20}\) Gehl Aufzeichnung (for the chancellor), June 8, 1967, PA AA B36/296; Israel’s population in 1967 was approximately 2,776,300, including 2,383,600 Jews and 392,700 Arabs, who, until 1966, were under military rule and were growing at a far faster rate than the Jews.

\(^{21}\) Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, Feb. 8, Apr. 18, 1967, PA AA B36/296. But there were also indications that the country was growing less insular: more than one hundred thousand Israelis traveled abroad in 1966, and, although television was banned until 1968, some 50,000 Israelis in 1966 reportedly watched black and white broadcasts from Cairo, Beirut, and even Cyprus. Tom Segev, 1967: *Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), pp. 26–27.


improving relations with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the GDR and repairing relations with the Arab world that had been ruptured in 1965. At home it introduced a program of government intervention – termed an “enlightened social market economy” – to mitigate the grim combination of inflation, unemployment, and a plummeting growth rate. However, this awkward (and presumably temporary) alliance of ideological opposites – making up an overwhelming majority of the country’s voters – was greeted with not only suspicion at home but also considerable reserve abroad.

Bonn’s foreign policy initiatives produced mixed results. The Federal Republic succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with the renegade Communist regime in Romania in January 1967 and concluded a two-year trade agreement with Czechoslovakia in August 1967, opening missions in both countries; but it failed to sway Moscow or East Berlin to respond to its overtures. Similarly, despite Jordan’s decision to reestablish diplomatic relations with Bonn in February 1967, Egypt and Algeria were in no hurry to abandon a bidding war between the two Germanys without receiving major concessions.

Brandt scored a major diplomatic coup in April 1967 when Abdul Khalek Hassuna, the general secretary of the Arab League, agreed to visit Bonn. The German chancellor and foreign minister assured the Arab emissary that reparation payments and arms deliveries to Israel had ceased; but they also refused Hassuna’s three principal demands, insisting that German aid to Palestinian refugees would be directed only through the offices of the UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and on individual negotiations with Arab governments without prior conditions, and refusing to issue a written statement of Bonn’s Near East policy.

The state funeral for Konrad Adenauer, who died on April 19, 1967, at age ninety-one, provided an opportunity for direct talks between Israelis and the new West German leadership. The Israeli delegation was led by


David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Abba Eban. In their private meeting on April 26, Kiesinger warmly greeted the former Israeli prime minister with whom he discussed a number of global issues, and Brandt briefed Eban on the Hassuna talks and his refusal to place German–Israeli relations as a negotiating point (Verhandlungsobjekt) in Bonn’s efforts to normalize its ties to the Arab world. Yet despite the foreign minister’s reassurances, the FRG’s invitation to the Arab League envoy – the first by a Western power – struck a raw nerve in Jerusalem.

Other elements of the German–Israeli relationship were improving. A commercial link was established on April 18, 1967, when the Israeliisch-Deutsche Handelskammer (IDHK) was founded in Tel Aviv and the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen mit Israel e.v. (GFW) was set up in Frankfurt, both for the purpose of reducing Israel’s trade deficit with the Federal Republic and increasing German investments in Israel. New business contacts were developing and Israelis participated in the Cologne and Hannover fairs that spring. And although all delivery of German military goods to Israel had ceased by 1967, personal and even business ties between the two sides had not been completely severed.

Another bond was more equivocal. As war clouds gathered in the Middle East in 1967, Axel Springer paid his third visit to Israel, expanded his papers’ Middle East coverage, and urged Kiesinger to adopt a pro-Israel stance. But Israel’s champion was a highly controversial political figure. Because the funeral fell on the first day of the Jewish Passover, both men and Ben Natan walked the five miles between the ambassador’s residence and the Bundestag but they declined to attend the interment. Ben Natan to For. Min., Bonn, Apr. 18, 1967, ISA 130 4011/7; Asher Ben Natan, “Herausforderungen im Schatten der Geschichte,” in Asher Ben Natan and Niels Hansen, Israel und Deutschland: Dorniger Weg zur Partnerschaft (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), p. 32.


To be sure, there was still considerable anti German sentiment in Israel: Shek to Ben Natan, Jan. 12, 1967, ISA 130 4011/7; Pauls, for example, resented the fact that except for the foreign ministry most Israeli officials still refused to receive him. Unsigned memorandum, Jerusalem, Mar. 29, 1967, evaluating the state of German Israeli relations, Shek memorandum, Apr. 11, 1967, ibid.


On his second visit to Israel in April 1967, Springer assured his hosts that the Kiesinger government would be far more “understanding” than its predecessor. Pauls to AA,
figure, criticized by left-leaning German liberals for defending Kiesinger’s appointment, opposing Ostpolitik, and supporting the US war in Vietnam. Springer was also the New Left’s bête noire for his control of some 40 percent of West Germany’s newspapers, which mocked the young Germans’ politics and garb. The students in 1967 launched an “expropriate Springer” campaign, emphasizing the large number of former Nazi journalists and staff in his employ and the articles that not only preached German-Jewish reconciliation but also glorified the Wehrmacht’s deeds. Springer had thus linked Israel with a zealous Cold Warrior and a target of the militant Left. ³⁴

**War**

The outbreak of the third Arab-Israeli war on June 5, 1967, created a Cold War crisis. Although neither Superpower had desired a confrontation, neither was willing or able to halt the fighting until Israel in only six days had won a decisive victory over two heavily armed Soviet clients, Egypt and Syria, and also over Jordan, and had tripled its size. Unlike in 1956, when the United States and the Soviet Union, working through the UN, had forced a withdrawal, in 1967 Washington sided with Israel’s demand for direct negotiations prior to an evacuation, and Moscow failed to mobilize sufficient diplomatic support to reverse the military verdict, leaving the region without a peace settlement. ³⁵

The results of June 1967 war went beyond the Superpower conflict. They not only changed the borders of the Middle East and created another refugee crisis but also spurred the creation of an independent Palestinian national movement. Moreover, the war had a powerful impact outside the region, leaving NATO shaken and, with the closing of the

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Map 3.1. Within six days in June 1967, Israeli forces captured the entire Sinai Peninsula, including the east bank of the Suez Canal from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank of the Jordan River, which included the Jordanian sector of Jerusalem that had been partitioned after the 1948-1949 war.
Suez Canal and the reduction of Arab oil deliveries, creating economic turmoil in Western Europe.  

At the outset of the war much of the Federal Republic was distracted by the Ohnesorg shooting and by the mass demonstrations that followed. Nonetheless, the conflict was not a surprise. During the previous month the German ambassador and the German media had reported extensively on the mounting prospect of war: on Egyptian president Nasser’s closure of the Strait of Tiran, his demand for the withdrawal of the UN forces, and his dispatch of his troops to the Sinai; on the vows by Iraqi, Algerian, and Palestinian leaders to drive the Jews into the sea; and on the mounting pressure on the Eshkol government from the Israeli military and public to respond.  

Israel’s appeal to Bonn on May 28 for twenty thousand gas masks for its civilian population (Nasser had reportedly used chemical weapons in the Yemen civil war) made a powerful impression. In his public appeal on May 31, the SPD deputy Adolf Arendt insisted, “We cannot be silent when the Israeli people is threatened with genocide.”

There was widespread support for an endangered Israel. From abroad, two prominent writers – Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Améry – also voiced fears of its annihilation, and at home Günter Grass, the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, and the pacifist theologian Helmut Gollwitzer echoed their words. By the beginning of June, the DIG, Aktion Sühnezeichen, and the trade unions had organized pro-Israel rallies in many of the universities and workplaces as well as in public sites. The German mainstream press portrayed Israel as David facing Goliath, as a liberal democracy menaced by aggressive and corrupt Arab regimes, and as a Western bulwark against Soviet expansion.  

the Arab side, few journalists questioned Nasser’s lethal intentions or Israel’s vulnerability.\(^{40}\)

When war erupted, Kiesinger immediately announced his government’s official policy of “non-interference” (Nichteinmischung), reiterating Bonn’s refusal to supply arms to areas of conflict. But during the heated Bundestag debate on June 7, the small but vocal FDP opposition questioned the government’s impartiality, citing the gas mask and lorry deliveries to Israel for worsening German-Arab relations and risking Soviet pressure on Berlin. Defending the coalition, the SPD faction leader, Helmut Schmidt, who a year earlier had made an extended visit to Israel, insisted: “Much as we value the traditional friendship of our people with the Arab peoples, we must protest the intention of their leaders to destroy Israel [die Absicht ihrer Führer Israel zu vernichten]” and several CDU deputies insisted that for the Germans Israel was “unlike any other state.”\(^{41}\) When it came his time to speak, Brandt, although reiterating his government’s official policy of non-intervention, stated that this did not mean “moral indifference” or “neutrality of the heart.”\(^{42}\)

There were strong expressions of popular support for Israel. Three hundred West Berlin youths volunteered for civilian service in Israel. In Frankfurt, the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft purchased Israeli bonds valued at DM 3 million and the city donated an additional DM 30,000 from its budget. In Hamburg and Stuttgart, doctors donated some DM 65,000 in medical and pharmaceutical supplies. In Bonn, some one thousand doctors, nurses, workers, soldiers, and young people offered their services to the Israeli Embassy, which also received several thousand letters, including financial donations; and Ben-Natan was “indefatigable” in raising funds and support for Israel.\(^{43}\)
The war’s unexpectedly short duration and Israel’s unanticipated and overwhelming military victory created a wave of relief in Germany. In his passionate editorial on June 10, Rudolf Augstein, editor of Der Spiegel, rejoiced that the Arab attempt to wipe out Israel had failed; the “David among the nations” had survived. Two decades of German guilt had been lifted. A joyful Grass announced: “A new situation has emerged . . . to express our solidarity for Israel and the fate of the Jews without our feelings being hindered by the past.”

The words Blitzkrieg and Blitzsieg resounded in the mainstream German press. The Springer newspapers were especially strident, exulting in the triumph of a “brother people” and in Israel’s successful reenactment of Germany’s own dark past. In Die Welt on June 10, Mathias Walden described the war’s “heart-stirring sentiments” and its “purifying storm,” which had suddenly made the use of arms respectable. Other Springer journalists barely concealed their admiration for the latter-day “desert foxes” Moshe Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin. Bild am Sonntag praised Israel’s capture of East Jerusalem, and Welt am Sonntag warned: “The Israelis did not win their freedom cheaply; neither will the Germans obtain theirs.”

Springer’s Cold War allusions raised hackles among his critics, who perceived no purifying storm or positive results. The conservative-liberal weekly Die Zeit chided Israel for risking a World War III, and the right-center Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung predicted that “no peace is in sight.” Augstein, in a dramatic turnabout, on June 26 faulted Israel for refusing to evacuate the conquered territories, thereby risking future wars with its vanquished neighbors, and doubted that a “smart, brave, and wise Israeli leader” would step forward with hard decisions at this heady moment of victory. Several writers also called for support for the Palestinian refugees.

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Criticism of Israel was even sharper at the extreme fringes. The neo-Nazi press, without hiding its admiration for the latter-day Rommels, labeled Israel the aggressor, ridiculed its alleged underdog status, and accused it of Nazi-like atrocities. Echoing Arab and Communist charges, it also accused the Bonn government of complicity in Israel’s war crimes.50

Germany’s radical Left, reversing its traditional sympathy toward Israel, reprimanded the victor in remarkably similar terms and also criticized its manipulation of German public opinion.51 Under the slogan “If Springer favors Israel, we must be opposed,” Ulrike Meinhof mocked Bild-Zeitung’s embrace of Israel, which she characterized as a militarized and no longer socialist state as well as an outpost of Western imperialism in the Middle East.52 On June 9, a student delegation in Frankfurt accosted Ben-Natan with the demand that Israel evacuate all the occupied territories.53

The Old Left’s protests against Israel’s chastisement by those too young to remember the Holocaust fell on deaf ears,54 as did Améry’s alarm over a new form of left-wing antisemitism.55 Ohnesorg’s death in June 1967 had lit a spark among eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old


Also, “Joint Declaration by Twenty Representatives of the German Left Concerning the Middle East Conflict,” drafted by Ernst Erdös and Michael Landmann and signed by eighteen Jewish and non Jewish leftist notables, including Bloch, Gollwitzer, and Grass as well as Iiring Fetscher, Walter Jens, Alexander Mitscherlich, Uwe Johnson, Martin Walser, and Ludwig von Friedeburg, in Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes, eds., Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany (New York: Holmes and Meier 1986), p. 23.

German radical activists, reinforcing their opposition to what they con-
sidered a repressive state and society. Vietnam and the Middle East war
had buttressed their antagonism toward Bonn’s Cold War bonds with the
United States and with Israel. In September, the New Left’s new stance
toward Israel became manifest in the resolutions of the national meeting
of the German Socialist Student Union (Sozialistische Deutsche
Studentenbund/SDS), which equated Zionism with colonialism and
voiced support for the Palestinians as fellow freedom fighters.56 Erich
Fried, who had fled Austria for England in 1938, expressed this new
image of Israel in his poetry: “You have survived/ those who were cruel
to you/Does their cruelty/now live on in you?”57

Indeed, the polarization of the entire German public toward Israel had
been widened by the 1967 war. One side – extending a vast political
distance from Axel Springer to Günter Grass – continued to support the
German–Israeli bond as a redemptive model and a pillar of the Bonn
Republic. The other side comprised a diverse mix, ranging from those
with long-held negative views toward Jews and Israel and bankers and
industrialists advocating closer ties with the Arab world, to those who
after June 1967 rebuked the former victim-turned-conqueror and trans-
ferred their sympathies to the defeated and, especially, to the
Palestinians.58

This chasm within the German public was both a response to dramatic
events and a generational phenomenon twenty-two years after the col-
lapse of the Third Reich. But it was also a reflection of a larger debate that
was emerging in the mid-1960s over West Germany’s political direction,
one in which the Middle East and Central Europe would be linked.59

To be sure, at the time the Bonn government was focusing less on the
public clamor than on the diplomatic fallout of the Middle East war, which

56 Martin Kloke, “Zwischen Resentiment und Heldenmythos: Das Bild der Palästinenser in
der deutschen Linksprese,” in Reinhard Renger, ed., Die deutsche “Linke” und der Staat
Israel (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1994), p. 53; Timo Stein, Zwischen Antisemitismus und
Israelkritik: Antizionismus in der deutschen Linken (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für
Sozialwissenschaften, 2001); Christoph Schmidt, “The Israel of the Spirit: The German Student Movement of the 1960s and Its Attitude toward the Holocaust,”
the naked feet/in the desert sand/will last longer than the marks/of your bombs and your
tanks,” ibid.
58 Leske Leverkusen, “Kriegsfolgen in Nahost,” Orient 5 (1967): 165; Willy Eichler,
“Moralischer Bankrott der Verantwortlichen,” Geist und Tag 22, no. 3 (1967): 129 32;
also Wolfgang Kraushaar, “Vom Philosemitismus zum Antizionismus: Der Sechs Tage
Krieg als Vehikel für eine 180 Grad Wendung,” Münchner Beiträge zur jüdischen
Geschichte und Kultur 11 (2017): 28 44.
59 Immanuel Geiss, “The Germans and the Middle East Crisis,” Midstream 13, no. 9 (Nov.
had exposed the Superpowers’ inadequate crisis management and its own vulnerability and isolation. West Germany’s unofficial position at the UN had been badly tarnished by Soviet and Arab charges that its economic, military, and personnel assistance had fueled the Israeli victory. The GDR played a leading role as public accuser, insinuating that Israel’s Blitzkrieg was modeled on Bonn’s plans to conquer East-Central Europe. The Hungarian delegation, which delivered the East German protest to the secretary-general, joined Poland in charging Bonn with “revanchism.”

The war’s economic and political shocks were also considerable. The closing of the Suez Canal had caught the FRG short of supertankers, and the two-month Arab oil embargo reduced its energy supplies, raising prices and threatening its export industries. Moreover, the pillars of West German security had been shaken. Not only had the United States, constrained by Vietnam and urban unrest, failed to restrain Israel’s pre-emptive strike, but also the FRG’s EEC partners had been sorely divided and NATO paralyzed by the Soviet threat to its southern flank. How would the West respond to a move by Moscow against West Berlin?


According to “Erdöl,” Der Spiegel 25 (June 12, 1967), pp. 27 28, the FRG in 1966 had imported 75.6 m. tons of oil (a quarter of the total 319.1 m. tons for all of Western Europe); its main suppliers were Kuwait, Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Algeria.


Kiesinger, reluctant to offer a grand design for peace in the Middle East, launched a moral offensive. In a speech at the end of June the chancellor vowed to bridge “the gulf between . . . North and South . . . rich and poor . . . white and colored.” In New York, the FRG’s permanent UN observer denied Arab and Communist charges and declared, “The German people know the horror and terror of war. . . . They know that force and war are no suitable means to achieve national goals or to solve international controversies.”

 Nonetheless, Bonn’s situation had deteriorated. At home there was the continuing economic recession and spreading anti-government demonstrations as well as growing tension between the two coalition partners. Another area of friction was over the proposed emergency law presented to the Bundestag on June 29. It replaced the Occupying Powers’ right to intervene in domestic disturbances with a constitutional amendment enabling the Bonn government to take action without prior parliamentary authorization, was opposed by the socialists and left-wing unions, and fueled nationwide protests that delayed passage until May 1968.

 Abroad, the coalition’s Ostpolitik was stalled. The Soviet Union, compelled to focus on resupplying arms and repairing its relations with Egypt and Syria (both disgruntled over its meager support during and after the June war) and fending off China’s taunts for its capitulation to the United States, could ill afford also to antagonize the GDR — a major economic contributor to the Communist bloc — by responding to the Federal Republic’s overtures. Kiesinger, fearing a backlash from his party, was adamant against any form of recognition of East Germany. Brandt and his colleagues, on the other hand, were more than ever

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determined not to halt the momentum of their efforts toward European détente.\textsuperscript{71}

Germany’s ties with two of its crucial allies were also strained. The bond with France, forged by Adenauer in 1963, had been badly shaken by de Gaulle’s moves to expand his country’s international status by challenging the existing Cold War order. In 1966, the French president had announced France’s exit from NATO’s joint command; and with his calls for a unified Europe between the Atlantic and the Urals (without advocating German reunification), de Gaulle had launched his own Ostpolitik toward the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc.\textsuperscript{72} Bilateral relations further deteriorated in 1967 after de Gaulle, on the eve of the June war, thwarted the FRG’s efforts to expand the EEC into a political union and to admit Great Britain.\textsuperscript{73} When war erupted, de Gaulle shocked Bonn with his unilateral condemnation of Israel’s first strike and his proposal for a four-power (instead of a UN) solution to the conflict.\textsuperscript{74}

Germany’s ties with the United States had also loosened. The Johnson administration appeared to be losing confidence in Bonn’s aims and leadership; and the FRG was disconcerted by Washington’s proposals for redefining NATO’s military and nuclear strategy, its demands for increased offset payments, and its moves toward détente with the Soviet Union that included the negotiations on a nuclear nonproliferation


treaty. Moreover, the NATO crisis precipitated by France not only threatened the alliance’s future and the mainstay of the FRG’s security but also underlined the diminishing prospects of German reunification—a pillar of Kiesinger’s party’s platform. The Kiesinger-Brandt visit to Washington in August 1967 temporarily patched up the relationship; but resolving the NATO crisis would force Bonn to conduct a delicate balancing act between Paris and Washington, make substantial compromises, and develop new thinking on foreign affairs.

Aftermath

When the Cold War spread to the Middle East in June 1967 the Bonn government was roused from its political immobility. Its principal challenge was in the Arab world, where Germany’s already-damaged relations had been worsened by its politicians’ and media’s pro-Israel pronouncements and by widespread Arab resentment of its support for Israel. Bonn’s principal rival, the GDR, had already raised DM 5 million on behalf of the war’s Arab victims and now launched a diplomatic campaign to obtain recognition from Egypt and Syria in return for increased aid from the Communist bloc.

The Kiesinger government responded promptly, urging the Bundestag to allocate DM 5 million in emergency aid through the German Red Cross to provide medicine, clothing, and shelter to the refugees in Jordan, and the bill was passed overwhelmingly on June 26 and with widespread popular support. But the Auswärtiges Amt

77 See AAPD 1967 2:1189–1209.
80 Ulbricht to Brezhnev (draft, n.d.), BAL DY 30 3666 (microfilm), reviewing the meetings between Deputy Prime Minister Gerhard Weiss and Egyptian and Syrian officials, July 6 22, 1967; also Aufzeichnung, Bonn, July 28, 1967, PA AA DDR 687 II A1/82.00; and ibid., 683 II A1/80.08/0.
pressed for an even more fundamental change in German foreign policy. Building on its long-standing objections to the “one-sided” policy toward Israel, its officials urged the Bonn government to conduct a far more evenhanded Middle East policy, to emulate de Gaulle’s realpolitik, and to pursue its own interests. In the long run, as one official asserted, the Arab countries possessed greater strategic, political, and economic weight in East-West relations than did Israel.\footnote{Unsigned Aufzeichnung, June 22, 1967, “Konsequenzen für die Bundesrepublik aus der jetzigen Nahost Situation,” PA AA B36/285; also Meyer Lindenberg Aufzeichnungen, June 21, June 23, July 27, 1967, AAPD 1967 2:939 40, 950 52, 1138 41. Cf. Note, Paris, La République Fédérale et la crise du Moyen Orient, July 7, 1967, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z207.} Indeed, these sentiments coincided with the German public, which in a poll conducted that summer recorded a 77 percent approval of the government’s policy of non-intervention and believed in the virtues of “evenhandedness” in the Arab-Israeli quarrel.\footnote{Emnid Institut (Bielefeld) Monatlicher Dienst, Informationen (July 1967), p. 16.}

Brandt strongly favored a new course. Without renouncing Bonn’s commitment to Israel’s survival – now greatly improved by the war’s results – the foreign minister and his circle believed that Germany must expand its business and political interests in the Arab world in order to strengthen its “policy of movement” in Europe.\footnote{See Brandt’s amendments to Meyer Lindenberg Aufzeichnung, June 23, 1967, AAPD 1967 2:950 52; also Bahr to Brandt, Bonn, June 15, 1967, AdsD EB 442, July 7, 1967, ibid., WBA Aus. 20. Significantly, the German ambassador was recalled to Bonn on June 27 28 for talks with Brandt and the Auswärtiges Amt on the new political and territorial conditions after the June war. Seydoux to MAE, Bonn, June 26, 1967, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z207.} Brandt urged German journalists to tone down their anti-Arab rhetoric.\footnote{Brandt press conference, July 10, 1967, PA AA B36/286; unsigned tel. to Germ. Embassy Rabat, July 12, 1967, ibid.}

He sent an emissary, the SPD’s Arab specialist Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, to Jordan, offering an additional DM 50 million to aid some 200,000 Palestinian refugees that had arrived in that country.\footnote{Meyer Lindenberg Aufzeichnung, June 21, 1967, AAPD 1967 2:938 40; Seydoux to MAE, Bonn, June 29, 1967, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z207.} And working behind the scenes, he and his party colleagues, mixing threats and economic blandishments, urged Arab leaders to limit the oil boycott (which only Iraq had fully imposed) and to withhold recognition of the GDR.\footnote{Meyer Lindenberg Aufzeichnung, July 27, 1967, AAPD 1967 2:1138 41.}

Bonn’s strategy paid off. At the Arab League summit in Khartoum, held between August 29 and September 1, 1967, the delegates from twelve states famously issued the three famous “no’s” to Israel’s
demand for direct peace talks in return for an evacuation of captured Arab territories: no negotiations, no recognition, and no peace. But, more significantly at Khartoum, the moderate majority, signaling its readiness to pursue a Great Power-brokered political solution through the United Nations, renounced the hard-line positions of Syria, Algeria, and Iraq calling for a continuation of the military struggle, and refused Palestinian leader Ahmad Shukeiry’s plea to conduct guerrilla warfare against Israel. Moreover, the message to Bonn was positive: the League lifted the oil embargo, declined to recognize the GDR, and indicated interest in closer relations with the Federal Republic, whose ties with Jordan as well as Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia had remained more or less intact throughout the crisis.

Paradoxically, at the very time Bonn was seeking to deepen and expand its ties with the Arab world, there was also a major change in Israel’s attitude toward the FRG: an unexpected and massive outpouring of gratitude for all the personal and institutional gestures of support before and during the war – the telegrams, demonstrations, cash contributions, and official statements that had belied its official neutrality and counteracted de Gaulle’s censure and the antagonism of the Communist camp. For many Israelis this support had suddenly mitigated (if not entirely removed) their deeply rooted coldness toward the FRG over its Nazi past, Third Reich holdovers, and recent overtures to the Arabs. Journalists in the major Israeli newspapers, including formerly outspoken German critics, suddenly reversed their hostile positions; and leading politicians openly cited the FRG, along with the Netherlands, as the sole European countries to stand by Israel in its hour of need. Only a year after his dour

88 D. C. Watt, “The Arab Summit Conference and After,” The World Today 23, no. 10 (Oct. 1967): 443–50. The attendees were Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Yemen, Sudan, and Lebanon; Syria boycotted the meeting.
90 Germ. Amb. Rabat to AA, Sept. 6, 1967, PA AA B36/288; unsigned Aufzeichnung, Sept. 6, 1967, ibid., B36/290; Klaiber to AA, Paris, Sept. 8, 1967, ibid., B36/288; Brandt Press Conference Sept. 7, 1967, ibid., B36/290. Aside from Bonn’s pressure, Egypt’s two year delay in recognizing the GDR was likely due to the Soviet imposed restrictions on delivering offensive weapons as well as Nasser’s inclination to keep the two German states competing for his favor.
91 Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, June 7, 1967, PA AA B36/282; also Pauls to AA Tel Aviv, Pauls to AA, June 21, 1967, PA AA B36/296, with considerable detail.
92 Pauls to AA Tel Aviv, July 12, 1967, PA AA B36/296.
comment to Adenauer about awaiting “deeds” from Bonn, Eshkol offered thanks for its solidarity and called for better relations between the two countries.93

West Germany’s status in Israel was further enhanced by Axel Springer’s visit immediately after the war.94 It was followed that summer by a swell of German politicians, businessmen, tourists, and volunteer workers, and in October by large trade union deputation and the one hundred–strong delegation of the West German Friends of the Hebrew University to lay the cornerstone of the Martin Buber Center for Adult Education on Mount Scopus.95

American Jews also responded positively. Putting aside their qualms over Kiesinger’s past, Bonn’s Ostpolitik, and the FRG’s courtship of the Arabs, the leaders of the three major Jewish organizations met with the chancellor during his August 1967 Washington visit and expressed gratitude for his country’s support of Israel.96 Although some Israelis and Americans remained skeptical of Bonn’s intentions, enough good will had been expressed to kindle German hopes for more normal relations with Israel.97

Israelis headed to Europe. Soon after the war Eshkol dispatched Shimon Peres, the leading Rafi Knesset member and former director general of the Defense Ministry, on a trip to Bonn, Paris, and Rome. Upon arriving in the West German capital on June 22, Peres held private discussions with Kiesinger and Brandt and also with his old negotiating partner (and now finance minister) Franz Josef Strauss for the purpose of explaining Israel’s “thoughts and hopes on peace.”98 And after the Eshkol government lifted the long-standing travel restrictions, Israeli local

93 Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, July 25, 1967, PA AA B36/297. Former chancellor Erhard paid a visit to Israel between October 30 and November 10, 1967.
95 American Jewish Year Book, vol. 69 (New York: American Jewish Committee/Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), pp. 486 88. At their meeting in Munich in July 1967, German and Israeli educators agreed to revise passages on Germany and Israel in their respective textbooks.
officials as well as journalists, teachers, students, athletes, artists, and youth groups followed.99

Predictably, this flurry of comradeship produced a backlash in the Arab world, especially after the press reported Israeli predictions of Bonn’s “vigorou support” for its economic and political goals, forcing the Auswärtiges Amt to issue a strong denial.100 Although every German negotiation with Israel since 1952 had drawn Arab disapproval and threats, this time Bonn was not cowed. More self-confident and assertive, the Federal Republic appeared to be less fearful of criticism from either side.101

First on the German–Israeli agenda was the renewal of Israel’s annual development loan. During their April talks in Bonn, Ben-Gurion had appealed to Kiesinger and Eban to Brandt to maintain the DM 160 million figure, despite Germany’s straitened economic circumstances.102 Brandt, striving to improve relations with the Arab states, had deferred the negotiations. Even after the cabinet in early June had verbally agreed to renew the DM 160 million loan, the Auswärtiges Amt was determined to delay.103 Ben-Natan made another appeal on July 3; but one day later Bahr urged Brandt to postpone politically inopportune discussions that would be leaked by the Israelis, infuriate the Arabs (to whom “we cannot make comparable concessions”), fuel the GDR’s recognition campaign, and “frustrate our Neue Ostpolitik.”104

After the Khartoum meeting had produced positive results for the FRG, there appeared to be no further reason for Bonn to delay and indeed a strong rationale to proceed, especially to squelch the wild rumors circulating in Cairo of even larger sums.105 Nonetheless, the actual
signing of the loan agreement did not occur until October 4, 1967, six months after Eban’s initial appeal. Also, the agreement was accompanied by a sour exchange: a warning from State Secretary Rolf Lahr against expecting the same amount and conditions in the following year, and Ben-Natan’s protest against still another round of drawn-out negotiations. Although West Germany had responded generously to Israel’s considerable needs after the June war, the new government had also expressed its new resolve to control the relationship according to its larger diplomatic aims.

The second issue, Israel’s plea for closer ties with the European Economic Community, posed an even greater challenge, one in which Bonn would face not only Arab objections but also the opposition of its Western partners. Three years earlier, after long and difficult negotiations with the EEC, Israel on June 4, 1964 had signed a three-year trade agreement providing not only a limited number of benefits but also alleviating its isolation by establishing institutional links with Western Europe.

With the trade agreement due to expire on June 30, 1967, Israel had launched a new campaign to become the EEC’s first non-European associate member. Israel was in the midst of a severe recession, suffering a trade deficit with the Six EEC members (one that was expected to rise in the future), and also determined to reduce its political dependency on the United States and forestall Arab initiatives to link up with Europe. In its October 4, 1966, note to Brussels, Israel had based its application on Article 238 of the Rome Treaty (whose provisions did not preclude non-European members) as well as the precedents already set by arrangements with Greece and Turkey. In its message, the Israeli government evoked the historic bonds between the Jews and Europe and its urgent economic situation, and assured the Six that it “would find in it a loyal and efficient...
In December, the EEC Council had tasked the commission with examining the Israeli proposal.109

Israel faced a grueling struggle to override Arab protests and open Brussels’ doors to its exports.110 Having won support from the European Parliament, the Benelux governments, and the United States, it still had to convince the three largest members, Italy, France, and, especially, Germany.111 Ben-Natan set out to transform Bonn’s lukewarm support into an active endorsement and applied a threefold strategy by appealing to the old CDU sense of moral responsibility toward Israel, evoking the SPD’s traditional solidarity with Israel, and emphasizing that a collective EEC decision would shield the Federal Republic against Arab reprisals.112 On their visit to attend the Adenauer funeral, Ben-Gurion and Eban had added their voices.113 Israel also enlisted several leading figures, among them Strauss and Springer on one side and Grass on the other, to bolster its case.114

The Grand Coalition government equivocated on this issue. Although Brandt had resisted Hassuna’s threats of retaliation, Kiesinger and Brandt also made no commitment to the Israelis.115 Nonetheless, despite strong political reservations, the Federal Republic notified its five colleagues that it intended to support an improvement in Israel’s relations with the EEC “to any reasonable extent.”116

In an unexpected move on June 7, 1967 – two days after the outbreak of the June war and therefore widely regarded as a political gesture of sympathy toward Israel – the EEC Commission came out in favor of granting associate member status.117 Israel, ignoring the political and economic fallout in Europe of the June war, expected that the council after reading the document naturally.
would take action in July and asked for a strong German endorsement. Instead Bonn, unwilling to risk Arab retaliation, notified Brussels on July 10 that, although favoring Israel’s application for an associate membership, it believed that any deliberations during the current “crisis situation” might intensify the oil boycott and thus, indirectly, produce “detrimental results” for Israel. The French, even firmer, vetoed the commission’s recommendation in the Council of Ministers, thereby blocking further negotiations and maintaining the trade agreement in force for an additional year.

Before making its next move, Bonn fended off Israeli requests and awaited a UN resolution on the outcome of the June war, which was passed in November. At that point, recognizing that Israel’s campaign had been crushed by events (and not only by French objections but also by the competing claims of Morocco and Tunisia, both of which it supported), Germany proposed an alternative to the current unsatisfactory arrangement and a reprise of the unsuccessful associate-member negotiations. As the chair of the December EEC Council meeting, the FRG representative proposed a preferential trade agreement between the EEC and Israel. However, even this compromise was defeated when France and Italy raised political as well as economic objections and the Benelux countries also backed down. There would be no change in Israel’s relations with the EEC until June 29, 1970.

These difficult EEC negotiations in 1967 had a significant impact on Bonn, forcing it to recognize that its partners, heavily dependent upon Arab oil and trade, did not share its sense of historic obligation toward the Jewish people or its fraught relationship with Israel and would insist on a “conflict-neutral” policy in the Middle East. On the other hand, as

120 Ibid.; also Ilan Greilsammer, Israël et l’Europe (Lausanne: Fondation Jean Monnet, 1981), pp. 49-72. In the meantime, a special “Israel group” consisting of the Six’s permanent representatives in Brussels was assembled, which called on the commission to provide “additional material and analysis” to back up its June 7 recommendation.
122 At which time, with Dutch and German pressure overcoming French objections (and in defiance of Arab League threats), the EEC signed a preferential trade agreement with Israel along with Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Although not fulfilling Israel’s hopes for an associate membership, the new agreement offered significant economic gains and was thus characterized by Foreign Minister Abba Eban as a next step on “its way to Europe.” Howard Sachar, Israel and Europe: An Appraisal in History (New York: Knopf, 1999), p. 216.
the international chaos on the eve of the June war had clearly demonstrated, West Germany needed a strong and united European Economic Community in order to protect its own and Europe’s interests, and also one that would bolster its Ostpolitik. The Franco-German split over the Middle East and the EEC’s negative response to the Israeli membership application thus presaged a new phase in West German–Israeli relations: After 1967, the FRG’s diplomacy would begin to be shaped by its European commitments.

The third major issue between Bonn and Jerusalem was their divergent views over the solution to the Middle East conflict after the June 1967 war. West Germany needed a swiftly negotiated peace in order to repair its relations with the Arabs and pursue its Ostpolitik; but Israel, having experienced a threat to its existence and receiving US backing afterward, insisted on achieving the full fruits of its military victory. It demanded maximum security guarantees and minimized both the threats of Arab retaliation and the impact of the Middle East struggle elsewhere. The Federal Republic, although without a voice in the UN deliberations, strongly supported the Security Council’s Resolution 242, passed on November 22, 1967, calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces, the termination of belligerency, and the right of all the states in the area to live in peace within “secure and recognized boundaries,” a goal to be reached through the offices of a UN mediator and guaranteed by the Great Powers. Israel, on the other hand, opposed any outside interference and refused to evacuate the occupied territories before the Arabs agreed to direct talks. And, to be sure, the Arabs, who were in the process of receiving new arms from Moscow, had no intention of acknowledging their defeat.

Thus friction arose between the Federal Republic and Israel according to their separate goals. The Israelis were sensitive to German criticism, especially by long-standing SPD supporters, over the Palestinian issue and the plight of Jordan, a major loser in the war. Bonn’s efforts to aid


125 Cana’an to FM, Bonn, Aug. 1, 1967, ISA 130 4013/2, on SPD policy toward Israel after the war.

In an interesting parallel, after June 1967 the Second International (in which both Israel and West Germany, represented by Golda Meir and Willy Brandt, played leading roles) abruptly reversed its pro-Israel stance and began engaging with the Arab world. Hans Krech, Die Nahostpolitik der Sozialistischen Internationale (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Köster, 1996), pp. 15–18.
the refugees were accompanied by disapproving comments over Israel’s restrictions allowing them to return to their homes on the West Bank.  

Moreover, the Jerusalem issue divided the two countries. The Federal Republic, adhering to the UN General Assembly vote on November 29, 1947, that aimed at internationalizing the city, had never recognized either Israeli or Jordanian sovereignty over their captured areas in Jerusalem; and Bonn diplomats had scrupulously avoided attending official Israeli events in that city. Their differences widened after the Israeli government announced the unification of the entire city on June 27, 1967. By fall, the Springer press was awash with positive comparisons between a united Jerusalem and a still-divided Berlin (which Pauls briskly refuted); but the German government raised Israeli ire in October 1967 by refusing to grant any official status to former chancellor Erhard’s visit to the Holy Sites, deeming this a “private undertaking.”

Bonn was also uncomfortable with the establishment of an occupation regime in the former Arab territories. As heirs to a state that had conquered and ruled large swaths of Europe and brought disaster to the Continent, German officials were deeply skeptical over the Israelis’ euphoria and their belief that victory on the battlefield would bring peace to the region.

Bonn baffled and exasperated Israeli officials with its hesitancy – in contrast with the forthright support of the United States and the Netherlands – to take their side either privately or publicly after the June 1967 war. The German government resisted Israel’s appeals to pressure Jordan to break with the Arabs and enter direct peace talks, and it had refused to twist arms in the EEC on Israel’s behalf. Bonn, for its

126 Details on financial assistance, which Bonn coordinated with the EEC and UNRWA, PA AA B36/296; Israeli Embassy Bonn to West European Desk, Aug. 1, 1967, ISA 130 4013/2; Pauls Eban meeting, FM to Bonn Embassy, Aug. 7, 1967, Ben Natan to FM, Sept. 12, 1967, ibid., 5011/7. Israel believed that Jordan was escalating the refugee problem to gain Bonn’s sympathy and embarrass Israel.


128 AAPD 1967 3:1454 55, 1464 65, 1488 89; Pauls had to cancel Erhard’s scheduled visit to the Hebrew University because of the threat of anti-German demonstrations. Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, Nov. 27, 1967, AAPD 1967 2:1156, objecting strongly to comparisons between Berlin, inhabited by one people separated by a foreign power, and Jerusalem, a city of two distinctive peoples “united” by “military occupation.”


part, was baffled by its inability to exert any influence over Israeli policy.  

In sum, Israel’s overwhelming victory in 1967 had changed its position vis-à-vis West Germany, transforming a former victim and dependent into a regional power and one that could thwart Bonn’s short- and long-term diplomatic aims. When Israel appeared to be in danger, Germany’s political leaders, press, and more than half of its public had poured out their sympathy; but when neither its military victory nor the Superpowers’ response brought peace to the Middle East and a growing number of West Germans began criticizing Israeli policies, the Bonn government became more determined than ever to alter the relationship.  

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Time is working for us.¹

Without losing sight of realities, we still have the intention of helping to relieve tensions and organizing steps toward peace.²

In a stark contrast with his cold reception three years earlier, Rolf Pauls’s departure from Israel on July 29, 1968, was remarkably cordial, and even festive.³ Two weeks earlier, Eshkol had granted a forty-minute interview to Israel’s “most expensive ambassador,” and at Pauls’s official farewell luncheon Eban had underscored Israel’s immense gratitude for West German support during the June 1967 war. On July 22, the FRG’s envoy invited several hundred Israelis (including cabinet ministers and most of the country’s leading politicians and diplomats) to his gala leave-taking reception in the ballroom of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem – a site and a gesture greatly appreciated in official circles.⁴ Another telling incident occurred when Pauls, in one of his last official acts (and at an expense of DM 6,201), ordered the lowering of the embassy’s three-meter-high protective grid to the identical height of its neighbors – and without eliciting any reaction from the Israeli public and press.⁵

Although there was widespread agreement that the former Wehrmacht officer’s mission had been a success, both sides defined it differently: for the Federal

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¹ Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, quoted in Der Spiegel (July 30, 1968).
² Willy Brandt, Interview on German television channel ZDF, Aug. 25, 1968, on his reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. http://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unitcontent/unit/02bb76df0d664c08a58ad4686a3e68ff/4e1ef32d5fc3454880c6de9118c086b9/Resources#4765a23d297348e9aee5d1b54915454c en&overlay (accessed Dec. 25, 2014).
⁵ “Mit dem Deutschen Hass in Israel, Der Spiegel 32 (1968), p. 18. Although the embassy offices were now located in central Tel Aviv, the official residence was in Herzliya Pituah.
Republic, creating an almost-normal relationship, and for Israel sustaining hopes that its special aspects would be upheld.6

Another Tumultuous Year

The year 1968 was one of the most pivotal of the twentieth century, known not only for the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, and the mounting urban unrest and antiwar demonstrations in the United States and throughout the world.7 It was also a year of two significant transnational developments: the convocation of the first UN World Conference on Human Rights in Tehran in April, and the signing of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in July, one marking the new assertiveness of the non-Western world against colonialism and racial discrimination, the other marking the Superpowers’ efforts to promote détente in order to maintain control over an increasingly restive world.8

It was also in 1968 that West Germany and Israel, facing challenges at home and abroad, continued to move in diverging directions. The Federal Republic was still avidly pursuing an Ostpolitik requiring not only conciliation with its Communist neighbors but also the resumption of ties with nine of the remaining Arab states that had broken relations in 1965. And Israel, while resisting outside pressure, was not only attempting to achieve peace on its own terms but also beginning to consolidate the fruits of its stunning military victory one year earlier. During the summer of Rolf Pauls’s celebratory departure, two major events would abruptly test each country’s direction and strain their bilateral relations.

Political Strains

Both Germany and Israel in 1968 were still governed by unprecedented coalitions of political rivals that had been initially created to deal with national emergencies and were now preparing to compete in the next

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6 Sixteen years later, Pauls (who subsequently served as ambassador to the United States, China, and NATO) acknowledged the “historical moral burden” underlying “German Jewish [sic] relations.” Rolf Friedemann Pauls, Deutschlands Standort in der Welt: Beobachtungen eines Botschafters (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1984), p. 127.


year’s national elections. Despite a measure of collaboration on pressing domestic issues, both coalitions failed to tackle the electoral reforms that would have reduced the power of the small parties; and both were at odds over fundamental foreign policy questions, in the Federal Republic over the pace and extent of Ostpolitik and in Israel over making peace with its Arab neighbors.

Thanks to its overwhelming parliamentary majority, West Germany’s Grand Coalition had managed to tame the recession and had also drawn up the long-delayed Emergency Legislation required to deal with the domestic disorder that had erupted in the Federal Republic a year earlier. However, in the spring of 1968 the Bonn government suddenly faced challenges from the Left and the Right. Over the Easter Sunday weekend, the streets of the Federal Republic were filled with tens of thousands of demonstrators shocked by the attempted assassination of Socialist German Student Union (SDS) leader Rudi Dutschke by the twenty-four-year-old, right-wing fanatic Josef Bachmann and protesting the frailty of West Germany’s democratic institutions. In West Berlin, twelve thousand students marched on the headquarters of the Springer press (whose diatribes against “Red Rudi” had allegedly incited the assassin), demanding that the media magnate be “dispossessed.” Two weeks later, there was another alarm when the right-wing NPD scored its largest victory yet in the Baden-Württemberg elections, winning almost four hundred thousand votes (9.8 percent of the total) and sending twelve deputies to the state parliament. Then, on May 11, 1968, eighty thousand protestors gathered in Bonn to voice anger at the Emergency Laws: the impending curbs on civil liberties and the revival of a Nazi-style police state.


This burst of domestic unrest threatened to undermine Bonn’s growing stature abroad and provide grist to its Communist critics, especially in East Berlin.\textsuperscript{13} Predictably, it also produced shockwaves in Israel.\textsuperscript{14} Despite Ben-Natan’s efforts to downplay the threat from the Right, several Israeli politicians warned of the prospect of the NPD’s entry into the Bundestag in 1969.\textsuperscript{13}

West Germany’s small but vocal left-wing movement, which received considerable attention from the press and a sympathetic response from Willy Brandt, posed an even graver threat to German–Israeli relations. Linking Israel with the reviled Axel Springer, the youthful protestors made it an accomplice to the media magnate’s Cold War crusade against Communism. Moreover, the SDS proponents of Third World liberation also tied Israel to US and Western imperialism and accused it of racism toward its Arab population. Early in 1968, Ben-Natan began facing hostile demonstrators in the streets and protests at his university talks in Frankfurt and Hamburg with their chants and placards linking Zionism with Fascism.\textsuperscript{16}

Israel’s domestic scene was similarly unsettled. Its National Unity government, formed on the eve of the June 1967 war, also had an overwhelming majority in the parliament, but it contained an even larger number of dissident voices than in Bonn, including the firebrand Herut leader Menachem Begin who had opposed UN Resolution 242.\textsuperscript{17} Faced


\textsuperscript{14} Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1968, PA AA B5/34.

\textsuperscript{15} In his memoir, Brücken bauen aber nicht vergessen: Als erster Botschafter Israels in der Bundesrepublik (1965 1969) (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2005), p. 124, Ben Natan estimated that in 1968 some 15 percent of the FRG’s population still supported the extreme Right, which, however, fortunately lacked both a charismatic leader and coherent political program to expand its appeal to the larger population. Cf. Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, July 9, Aug. 13, 1968, PA AA B5/34; also Sterling report, July 3, 1968, AJCA, Gold Executive Files, Box 12.


with outside pressures – and particularly the prospect of UN-sponsored peace talks led by the Swedish diplomat Gunnar Jarring – Prime Minister Levi Eshkol on January 21, 1968, engineered the creation of the Israeli Labor Party by merging his dominant Mapai with its two smaller rivals, Rafi and Ahdut HaAvoda, which now alone would control 59 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. However, this move toward the creation of several large Israeli political blocs did not efface (and perhaps even exacerbated) the contention among the leaders of the three combined labor parties over Eshkol’s succession and, especially, over the fate of the occupied territories.

Within the mainstream Israeli public there was growing disagreement over the future of the West Bank. One side, led by a vocal group of prominent writers and religious, academic, business, and military figures, on October 31, 1967, had founded the “Movement for the Greater Land of Israel.” Stressing religious, nationalist, and strategic concerns, they had begun lobbying the government against any withdrawal and advocated Jewish settlement of the occupied territories, which they called by their biblical names Judea and Samaria. A dramatic manifestation of settlement fervor occurred in April 1968 when a group of thirty Jews, responding to an appeal by religious fundamentalist Rabbi Moshe Levinger, celebrated the Passover holiday in Hebron and announced their desire to stay indefinitely.

A second group, drawing on the earlier pacifist elements of Zionism that had advocated coexistence with the Arabs, opposed any settlement of the occupied lands. Naming themselves a “Movement for Peace and Security,” a group of scientists, academics, and religious leaders on July 1, 1968, called on the government to return all the territories in exchange for a “real” peace. The demand for withdrawal was endorsed by left-wing journalists, students, writers, and politicians who feared that the occupation would undermine Jewish democracy. But not only was this group fragmented into differing worldviews, ranging from its anti-Zionists

21 While the government wavered over evicting them, the military relocated the group to a military base, which three years later would become the settlement Kiryat Arba.
and supporters of a binational state to its various religious and secular factions; the peace movement’s message of renunciation, predicated on concluding an agreement with resistant Arabs, had also failed to gain widespread public support in the still euphoric time after the June war.  

On May 2, 1968, Israel celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a giant two-hour military parade through all of Jerusalem, which was witnessed by a half million spectators but drew protests from friends as well as enemies. That day, Eshkol announced, “We are determined not to return to borders that involve dangers to Israeli security.” But the Israeli government’s split between hawks and doves, its fragmented populace, and its heavily mobilized media had also created an opening in 1968, into which revered military leaders, particularly Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, were able to exert outsize influence that would include the beginning of settlements in the Golan, West Bank, Gaza, and Sinai.

By 1968, several West European governments had begun voicing concern over the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the future of their inhabitants. The Federal Republic, because of its earlier commitment of aid to the Palestinians, was uneasy over the even larger numbers of refugees now under Israeli control and awaited Israeli initiatives, hoping that it would demonstrate realism and flexibility. Pauls underlined Israel’s new dilemma: the potentially vast increase of Israel’s Arab subjects threatening to outnumber its Jewish population and threaten its democracy.

Advances and Setbacks Abroad

In the first half of 1968, while the Superpowers continued to rearm their Middle East clients, Jarring launched his shuttle mission between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt without bringing the parties together. Indeed, few expected any progress toward peace during this US presidential election.

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27 Idan to FM, Bonn, Jan. 2, 1968, ISA 130 4184/4372.
28 Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, Jan. 19, 1968, PA AA B36/456.
year, with Washington obsessed over winding down the Vietnam War, Moscow preoccupied with China and its restive East European satellites, and neither Superpower willing or able to put pressure on their clients.29

The Grand Coalition, despite its internal division, made a few diplomatic advances in the first half of 1968. Continuing to make inroads into Eastern Europe, the FRG in January reestablished diplomatic ties with Yugoslavia and in March commenced negotiations with Alexander Dubček’s reform government in Czechoslovakia.30 Still hoping to repair diplomatic relations with the Arabs, Brandt paid visits to Morocco (in February) and Tunisia (in April), two governments that had not severed ties with Bonn, hoping to convince their rulers to intervene in Cairo on Bonn’s behalf; and in February 1968, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, Bonn’s minister for economic cooperation, urged King Hussein of Jordan to lend his support.31

However, these two initiatives were marred by several factors. Bonn’s Ostpolitik was stymied by Chancellor Kiesinger’s reluctance to formally acknowledge Europe’s postwar borders and grant any form of recognition to East Germany, which reinforced the hardliners on the Communist side and thwarted agreements with Prague, Warsaw, or Moscow.32 And Bonn’s Nahostpolitik was obstructed not only by its ties to Israel but also by the Soviets’ increasing influence in the hard-line Arab capitals as their major backer and arms supplier and also by Hussein’s fear of breaking with the beleaguered Nasser. Thus, despite all of Brandt’s efforts (and his repeated reminders of Bonn’s generous aid to the Palestinian refugees) the Arab League in its April meeting declined to discuss a resumption of relations.33

In a broader sense, the Bonn government was handicapped by the coalition partners’ indecision over the prospects and risks of attaining a greater voice in international affairs. Although Kiesinger’s preference for “small steps” (Kleinarbeit) contrasted with Brandt’s preference for bold

moves, both sides’ fear of isolation set limits to major diplomatic initiatives and underlined the need for patience, flexibility, and resourcefulness. On the one hand, Bonn still adhered to its traditional Cold War stance, viewing the Soviet Union as a menace, whether along the Elbe or in the Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, however, it manifested new flashes of independence, as in its objection to France’s veto of British entry into the European Economic Community and its resistance to US pressure to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [NPT].

And although Bonn’s leaders had agreed upon an ambitious program of using the FRG’s economic resources to win friends in Eastern Europe and overseas, they were divided over how best to convince the newly aroused West German public of their ability to represent the national interest abroad.

Israel, a country with no official allies, resolute Soviet and Arab opponents, and a new crop of Third World detractors, faced even greater foreign-policy challenges. Now occupying large swaths of Arab territory, Israel was subject to critical scrutiny, including from friendly governments, over its “unyielding” demeanor and its insistence on dealing directly with individual Arab governments. The Eshkol government also confronted a vocal and influential Jewish critic, Nahum Goldmann, the head of the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization, in 1968 launched a personal peace campaign that included private negotiations with US, Soviet, Yugoslav, Romanian, and West German representatives and a fiery June 18 address to the WZO, warning against the “illusions” of Israel’s “eternal superiority” over the Arabs as well as a provocative proposal for Israel’s “neutralization” as a means of securing its future in the Middle East.

Israeli foreign policy in 1968 was also hindered by its fragmented National Unity government, divided Labor alignment, and mobilized public. Its most important diplomatic initiative – to forestall the Jarring Mission by concluding an interim agreement over the West Bank – ran aground. It was stymied by the leadership’s wavering between creating an autonomous Palestinian administration linked to Israel and returning a

35 Detailed discussion in two day Aussenpolitische Kolloquium convened by Kiesinger in Heimerzheim, May 2, 3, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:525 52.
37 Goldmann negotiations: CZA Goldman papers Z6/2720; text of June 18 speech, ibid., 2733; neutralization proposal: Goldmann to Herzog, Aug. 18, 1968, Herzog to Goldmann, Sept. 9, 1968, ibid., 1151. Also see Rabin to Eban, Apr. 9, 1968, noting Goldmann’s “malignant” activities. AE C001/7.
large portion of (but not the entire) territory to King Hussein. To be sure, neither party was receptive to Israel’s overtures. The Palestinian option was foreclosed by the West Bank Palestinian notables’ refusal to enter separate negotiations with Israel; and the Jordanian option was blocked not only by King Hussein’s inability to “move without Cairo” but also by his unwillingness to submit to Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem and to any form of permanent Israeli military presence on the West Bank as outlined in the Allon Plan. In the meantime, Foreign Minister Abba Eban, a leading dove and one of the principal negotiators with Jordan, alarmed over Israel’s deteriorating image abroad – particularly the news reports depicting a “tyrannical” conqueror – proposed a major Hasbara [public relations] campaign to stress the “positive” aspects of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and its “normality.” Nonetheless, this new state of affairs was highly volatile.

The first spark was lit by Palestinian commandos (fedayeen), who were determined to strike out on their own and avenge the Arab defeat in June 1967. Based in Jordan, the nationalist resistance group Fatah, led by the shrewd and daring engineer Yasser Arafat, in early 1968 had begun conducting dozens of cross-border raids and mine-laying expeditions, culminating in the explosion on March 18 of an Israeli school bus, killing a teacher and a physician and wounding twenty-eight students. That night, despite the risk of foreign censure, the Israeli cabinet decided to wipe out Fatah’s principal base in Karameh.

40 Eban to Eshkol and Cabinet, Feb. 1, 1968, AE 00232. However, Rothschild to Meir, July 31, 1969, citing Israel’s worsening public relations abroad, called for “emergency” action. Ibid., 0193.
41 Literally, those who sacrifice themselves.
43 Karameh (Al Karama), five kilometers northeast of the Allenby Bridge and thirty five kilometers west of Amman, also contained a refugee camp housing several hundred
But “Operation Inferno” met unexpectedly strong resistance. Fifteen thousand Israeli troops, supported by jet aircraft and helicopters, faced not only some three hundred Palestinian guerrillas but also fifteen thousand Jordanian soldiers who inflicted unexpectedly high casualties and enabled Arafat and many of his followers to escape. Before withdrawing that day, Israeli forces had destroyed the base and also inflicted heavy casualties, among them civilians. And on March 24, the UN Security Council, rebuffing Israel’s insistence on its “right and duty” to “take all necessary measures” in self-defense against terrorism, unanimously condemned its violation of the cease-fire with its incursion into Jordan.

The Battle of Karameh dispelled the belief in Israel’s invincibility and produced three different narratives. For Palestinian nationalists and the intrepid Arafat (who eleven months later would become head of the Palestine Liberation Organization), it created a legend of heroic resistance and became a powerful recruiting tool for renewed attacks against Israel. For King Hussein, whose intelligence sources and well-prepared troops had tipped the outcome, it bolstered his image as an Arab nationalist and unyielding negotiator with Israel. But for Israel, the costly standoff at Karameh left a bitter aftertaste: Condemned by the public for its high casualties and failure to halt Palestinian incursions, the invasion also invited comparisons from foreign critics with America’s heavy-handed tactics in Vietnam.

One month later, Israel faced a second public setback in Tehran, where the United Nations between April 22 and May 13, 1968, convened the first World Conference on Human Rights. The now Third World–dominated General Assembly had promoted this meeting for the purpose of using the UN’s Human Rights apparatus to bolster the struggle against colonialism and racism. However, because of Great-Power resistance to human rights

civilians. Based on newly classified documents, Amir Oren, “Debacle in the Desert,” Ha’aretz, May 13, 2011, reviews Israel’s “biggest and most ambitious peacetime operation.”


45 New York Times, Mar. 25, 1968. Statement of US delegate Arthur Goldberg: “We believe that the military counteractions such as those which have just taken place, on a scale out of proportion to the acts of violence that preceded it, are greatly to be deplored.”


initiatives, little was expected of this gathering beyond renewed denunciations of Portuguese colonialism and South African Apartheid.\textsuperscript{50}

Without warning, Middle Eastern politics entered the Tehran deliberations. At the outset, Syria and Pakistan demanded Israel’s exclusion from the conference because of its aggression and continued occupation of Arab lands; and on April 28, over Western and Israeli objections, the Third World and Communist-dominated organizing committee added to the agenda a joint Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian motion denouncing Israeli policies toward the conquered Palestinians – the arrests, house demolitions, and deportations. During the heated plenary debate, Arab and Soviet delegates compared Israeli repression of the Palestinians with Nazi atrocities.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite the forceful rebuttals by Israel’s UN delegate Michael Comay (who cited Soviet and Arab persecution of their Jewish populations), its accusers on May 7, 1968, scored a major propaganda victory. By a vote of 42–5 (with twenty-five abstentions), the Tehran Conference adopted a six-point resolution expressing “grave concern for the violation of human rights” in the occupied territories and calling for an investigation by a special UN commission.\textsuperscript{52} Adding to Israeli chagrin was the fact that one of the yes votes had been cast by the West German delegate as a gesture of solidarity with the Arabs.\textsuperscript{53}

\section*{The State of West German–Israeli Relations}
Bonn and Jerusalem continued to move apart. With no personal contact between the two countries’ leaders, their ties were largely in the hands of

\textsuperscript{50} Roland Burke, “From Individual Rights to National Development: The First UN International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968,” \textit{Journal of World History} 19, no. 3 (Sept. 2008): 275–96, which echoes the objections, voiced at the time, over the meeting’s host, the autocratic shah of Iran.


\textsuperscript{53} Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, May 10, 1968, PA AA B36/324; report on entire conference in Boeker to AA, Tehran, May 13, 1968, ibid., B130/4331.

Although not a UN member the FRG, as a participant in several UN agencies, had been invited to Tehran (and the DDR was not); in his Apr. 24 report to the cabinet, Brandt had underlined the political importance of Bonn’s attendance at this meeting: \textit{Die Kabinettsprotokolle des Bundesregierung}, vol. 21, p. 174, n. 5, https://books.google.de/books?id=gSOEJqgw3WIC&pg=PA174&lpg=PA174&dq=un+teheran+konferenz+1968&source=bl&ots=jldtaIGVbh&sig=WKOthJK5iIIZIZ9zI3 G F94WXs&hl=de&sa=X&e i=Wd6NVfzUJcbR QG34lho&ved=0CEIQ6AEwCDgU#v=onepage&q=un%20teheran%20konferenz%201968&f=false.
their ambassadors: of Pauls who, having achieved a measure of respect and trust from Israeli officials, in his final year applied himself to urging them to conduct a more conciliatory policy toward Jordan; and of Ben-Natan who, facing an unreceptive Auswärtiges Amt, sought to expand support for Israel among West German public and private circles.\textsuperscript{54} But in his meeting with the Israeli ambassador on June 5, Brandt, citing the impending elections, declined an official visit by Eban or a trip by the FRG foreign minister to Israel.\textsuperscript{55}

There were a few positive developments in 1968. That year, Israel’s trade with West Germany – now its third-largest trading partner after Britain and the United States – grew substantially, although creating a DM 204.6 million Israeli deficit. There was also a marked increase in sport, cultural, and educational exchanges between the two countries, more tourism, and more visits by journalists and businesspeople. In November 1968, Lufthansa, with much fanfare, initiated direct flights from Frankfurt and Munich to Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{56} Moreover, the German–Israeli Association (Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft), now numbering 980 individual members (including 73 CDU and SPD Bundestag deputies) and 65 businesses, corporations, and institutions, and with its ambitious program of conferences, lectures, and publications, strove to broaden and deepen the two countries’ ties.\textsuperscript{57}

The Bonn government’s fixation on the Arab world (and on blocking the GDR’s efforts to win favor in Arab capitals) affected almost every West German–Israeli transaction. Thus, Israel’s application for an associate membership in the European Economic Community remained in suspense. And thus, in early 1968 the Auswärtiges Amt – fearing to “endanger our efforts to restore relations with the Arabs” – vetoed a government guarantee for an Israeli-negotiated DM 88 million loan from the Deutsche Bank to finance a new oil pipeline between Eilat and Ashkelon; Brandt relented only on condition that the loan fall under the rubric of development aid for Iran, that the secret Israeli-Iranian project remain unnamed in the official agreement, and that Iran’s national oil company alone be responsible for repayment.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} E.g., Pauls to AA, Tel Aviv, Apr. 29, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:513 14; Eban to Ben Natan, Apr. 30, ISA 130 4183/25, on Pauls Eban conversation and Idan to FM, Bonn, May 7, 1968, ISA 130.23/8184/27sr, on the embassy’s gala twentieth anniversary celebration, with some 1,800 guests, among them seven cabinet ministers as well as state secretaries, parliamentarians, military officers, and other friendly figures.

\textsuperscript{55} Frank Aufzeichnung, Bonn, June 5, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:672. Eban’s Apr. 1967 presence at Adenauer’s funeral was unofficial.

\textsuperscript{56} Vermerk, Mar. 25, 1969, PA AA B36/461.

\textsuperscript{57} Sterling report, July 3, 1968, YIVO AJC Files FAD 61/65.

That spring, the pipeline continued to create friction. After the two major steel suppliers, Mannesmann and Thyssen, in order to assuage the Arab League’s boycott threat, had given written assurances of their good will toward the Arab people Ben-Natan issued a mordant rebuke.\footnote{59}{“Boykott aus Düsseldorf: Thyssen und Mannesmann nehmen gegen Israel Partei,” \textit{Die Zeit}, May 31, 1968; also \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, May 28, 29, 1968. According to \textit{Der Spiegel}, June 3, 1968, the Israeli ambassador had termed the responses of the two companies (which had won an international competition for the DM 35 million contract to deliver 71,500 tons of steel) lacking “moral elegance.”} Thereupon, Economics Minister Karl Schiller retorted that the Arab steel market was ten times greater than Israel’s; AA Ministerial Director Paul Frank warned the Israelis against “jeopardizing” their relations; and Brandt also expressed disapproval of the ambassador’s public remarks. Ben-Natan persisted, dismissing the steel companies’ letters as “regrettable and dumb,” underlining his country’s sensitivity to the boycott, and warning that the incident had fueled “anti-German” sentiments in Israel.\footnote{60}{Lahr Aufzeichnung, May 22, 1968, \textit{Frank Aufzeichnungen}, May 30, June 5, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:634 36, 655 57, 676. The matter was settled in July: Fearing Arab retaliation, Thyssen withdrew from the deal; however, the Arab League relieved Mannesmann, which had already made its steel deliveries, from its boycott threat. The pipeline, completed in 1969, operated only until 1978, when the fall of the shah ended the secret Israeli Iranian partnership. “Inside Intel/The Story of Iranian Oil and Israeli Pipes,” \textit{Ha’aretz}, Oct. 11, 2007. On the boycott: David Losman, “The Arab Boycott of Israel,” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} 3 (1972): 99 122; A. J. Sarna, \textit{Boycott and Blacklist: A History of Arab Economic Warfare against Israel} (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986).}

Ben-Natan’s new direction also affected its annual development assistance to Israel. In response to Ben-Natan’s urgent request to expedite the negotiations, in May the \textit{Auswärtiges Amt} recommended reducing the FRG’s capital aid to Israel from DM 160 to 140 million. This reflected the strong consensus in Bonn that even this smaller sum would prejudice the FRG’s \textit{Nahostpolitik} and also was disproportionate to the sums to be allocated in 1968 to the friendly Arab governments of Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco.\footnote{61}{Jordan: DM 25 million; Tunisia DM 40 million; Morocco DM 50 million. Lahr Aufzeichnung, May 22, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:634 36.} Ben-Natan’s protests were to no avail; there were no
negotiations, and Israel had also to accept a higher interest rate and stiffer conditions. The Auswärtiges Amt, still stung by Arab and Communist charges of its complicity in the June 1967 war, was also exerting greater control over West Germany’s military relations with Israel. Although the FRG’s military officials and arms producers continued to maintain close ties with their Israeli counterparts, the AA shifted Bonn’s direction: Thus, while denying entry permits to Israeli officers, refusing export licenses, and canceling a major research contract between the Defense Ministry and an Israeli armaments firm, it approved the delivery of potential military articles to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Fending off Ben-Natan’s protests, Brandt promised a measure of flexibility in individual cases but, in general, he insisted that Bonn’s Ost- and Nahostpolitik, along with its NATO obligations, compelled it to apply the utmost discretion to its military dealings with Israel.

The issue of Jerusalem continued to separate the Federal Republic and Israel. Adhering to the UN’s condemnation of Israel’s “change in the city’s status” in 1967, the Auswärtiges Amt forbade Germans on official visits from visiting East Jerusalem. And although West Germany was not alone in this policy, its refusal to recognize the city’s unification, and its officials’ insistence on the lack of parallels with a divided Berlin raised particular resentment among Israelis, reinforcing their impression of a distinct shift in 1968 from a friendly supporter to a resolutely neutral observer. Moreover, the German public had also changed its views toward the Middle East: Only 10 percent believed in the prospect of peace, only 31 percent were convinced of the region’s importance, and 57 percent opposed any form of involvement by the Federal Republic.

64 Also protesting Defense Minister Gerhard Schröder’s inflexibility, both Idan and Ben Natan deplored the FRG’s “excessive” anxiety over its ties with Israel. Frank Aufzeichnungen, May 30, June 5, 1968, AAPD 1968 1:655 58, 672 76.
Two Crises

Algiers

For thirty-nine days during the summer of 1968, Israel entered a new stage in its conflict with the Palestinians. Before an aroused domestic public and a global audience, Israel sought to retrieve its captured aircraft and detained citizens, navigating the shoals of inter-Arab and international politics.67

The hijacking of civilian planes, an early Cold War fixture, had ebbed between 1962 and 1967 but re-emerged dramatically in 1968.68 In the early hours of July 23, three armed operatives from the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) seized El Al flight 426, carrying thirty-eight passengers and ten crew members from Rome to Tel Aviv, and diverted it to Algiers.69 The perpetrators were members of the newly formed Beirut-based rival of Arafat’s Fatah, a left-wing group intent on liberating all of Palestine, not through local border skirmishes, such as had erupted at Karameh, but through a global military and propaganda campaign against Israel.70

Algeria, one of Israel’s foremost Arab antagonists and a self-proclaimed champion of the Palestinian cause, was nonetheless discomfited by the

68 The first stage, up to 1952, involved airplane hijackings by Eastern Europeans fleeing Communism, the second seizures, between 1958 and 1961, were committed by pro Castro rebels, followed by Cuban defectors to the United States, and then by US planes diverted to Cuba. Peter St. John, “The Politics of Aviation Terrorism,” Terrorism and Political Violence 10, no. 3 (1998), p. 33.
70 Officially born on Dec. 11, 1967, from the merger of three rival nationalist groups, the PFLP was led by two doctors, the charismatic Marxist Leninist George Habash (Oriana Fallaci, “A Leader of the Fedayeen: We Want a War Like the Vietnam War: Interview with George Habash,” Life, 68, no. 22 [June 12, 1970]: 32–34) and the military strategist Wadi Haddad, who organized the 1968 hijacking and directed all the negotiations. John W. Amos, Palestinian Resistance: Organization of a Nationalist Movement (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), pp. 72–78.

The operation was all the more audacious because the hijackers had allegedly received information that several senior Israeli officers (among them Major General Ariel Sharon) would be on the flight. Middle East Record, vol. 4 (1968), p. 389.
unexpected arrival of the El Al plane on July 23. President Houari Boumedienne, who only two years earlier had seized power and had barely survived a 1967 military coup, still faced opposition to his regime. Although support for the hijackers would bolster Boumedienne’s domestic popularity and his reputation among Arab hard-liners, it gravely threatened Algeria’s current efforts to achieve recognition as a prudent and stable international actor maintaining a solidly non-aligned stance between the United States, the USSR, and China and seeking a leading role in Africa and at the UN; it would also undermine his efforts to attract foreign investments, modernize the country’s weak economy, and negotiate closer trade ties with Western Europe. Thus, although chastised in the Western press as an “accomplice” and a “pirate state” where Barbary Coast raiders had once found sanctuary, Algeria disclaimed responsibility for the airplane seizure and distanced itself from the hijackers. It placed the three Palestinians in captivity, immediately released sixteen non-Israeli passengers, and also allowed ten Israeli children and female passengers (including the stewardesses) to leave on another flight four days later on July 27. Moreover, it kept the remaining twelve Israeli male passengers and crew members in relatively comfortable quarters, promised a thorough investigation of the hijacking, and assumed the role of “honest broker.”

Israel, to be sure, was in a far more serious predicament. One of the seven planes in its busy international commercial fleet had been seized and the country’s vulnerability had been exposed by its enemies.


Adding to Algeria’s discomfiture as well as the Israeli captives’ fears was the fact that the Boumedienne government was still holding under house arrest the deposed former leader of separatist Katanga, Moïse Tshombe (whose private plane had been hijacked in 1967) and refusing neither to extradite him to the Congo nor to release him to his Belgian patrons. Abarbanell, Part 2 (Mar. 12, 2013); also Chicago Tribune, Aug. 14, 1968.

Responding to public outrage, the Israeli military [IDF] leadership prepared a daring rescue plan.\(^75\) But the Eshkol government decided to pursue a diplomatic solution, appealing at once to world leaders and to UN Secretary-General U Thant as well as to transport and aviation organizations to protest the threat to air safety posed by political terrorists and against Algeria’s violation of international law in holding the seized aircraft and civilians.\(^76\)

Eshkol’s options were limited. He had to rule out an appeal to the Security Council, presided over that month by Algeria and where a Soviet veto was anticipated;\(^77\) and he could expect little support either from the United States (with which Algeria had broken ties in June 1967)\(^78\) or from de Gaulle’s France, which was intent on expanding its influence in the Arab world.\(^79\) The Eshkol government therefore had to turn to Italy, over whose airspace the plane had been seized, and which only reluctantly agreed to negotiate on its behalf with Algiers.\(^80\)

The Palestinians now moved to the center of the world stage. On July 23, a PFLP spokesman in Cairo, taking sole credit for the operation and proclaiming it a new demonstration of “resistance to Israeli oppression,” demanded the release of one thousand Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.\(^81\) Six days later, at a press conference in Beirut, another PFLP

\(^75\) An armed mission was also supported by Israel’s ambassador to the United States: Rabin to Eban, Aug. 2, 1968, ISA 130 4300/10\(\text{??}\). Much later, the Jerusalem Post, July 6, 1977, published details, as did Abarbanell, “Hijacked”: Part 7 (June 5, 2013), Part 8 (July 22, 2013), Part 9 (Aug. 27, 2013), including the deceptive plans leaked to Algerian intelligence as well as threats to destroy Air Algeria’s entire fleet during the rescue operation.


\(^79\) Israel’s appeal to Wischnewski to use his personal influence in Algiers also reaped no results. See tels. July 24 (2), Aug. 2, 4, 5, 7, 1968, ISA 130 4300/5\(\text{??}\).

\(^80\) FM to Israeli Embassy Rome, July 30, Aug. 3 (2 tels.), Aug. 5, 1968, ISA 130 4300/10\(\text{??}\).

Italy, intent on relaunching its role in the Mediterranean and replacing its greatly reduced oil supplies (caused by the Suez Canal closing), had already begun negotiations with Algeria but was also open to contacts with Israel, which now controlled the oil fields in Sinai; Luca Riccardi, Il “probleme Israele”: Diplomazia italiana e PCI de fronte allo stato ebraico (1948 1973) (Milan: Guerini, 2006), pp. 312 18; Elisabetta Bini, “A Transatlantic Shock: Italy’s Energy Policies between the Mediterranean and the EEC, 1967 1974,” Historical Social Research 39, no. 4 (2014): 157. Israel also asked the United States to encourage Italy to act on its behalf. Tel. Aug. 8, 1968, ISA 130 4300/10\(\text{??}\).

\(^81\) Times [London], July 24, 1968.
spokesman repeated this demand, and that day a six-man joint-Palestinian delegation arrived in Algiers to stiffen that government’s opposition to releasing the plane and the remaining prisoners.\textsuperscript{82}

For almost two weeks there was a stalemate. In Algiers, Boumedienne and his foreign minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika – seemingly at odds over how to proceed – dragged out the investigation to avoid the impression of yielding to foreign pressure.\textsuperscript{83} Israel, refusing to submit to blackmail, rejected a prisoner exchange but sent two officials to Rome to work out the terms of a settlement.\textsuperscript{84} In the meantime, UN Secretary-General U Thant urged Boumedienne to expedite the release of the plane and passengers, threatening to absent himself from the September meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Algiers if the crisis was not settled.\textsuperscript{85} And the United States, although refusing Israel’s request for a public statement, worked behind the scenes urging Algeria to observe the customs of international law but also urging Israel to make a “gesture.”\textsuperscript{86}

The breakthrough began on August 13. After Algeria had rebuffed its two mediation efforts, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots’ Associations (IFALPA), representing some thirty thousand pilots in fifty countries, announced a boycott – the first in its history – of all flights to that country if the passengers and plane were not immediately and unconditionally released.\textsuperscript{87} Faced with a rupture of its ties with the world, Algeria relented, promising the IFALPA negotiators to release

\textsuperscript{82} Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, July 30, 1968; New York Times, July 30, 1968. Also, Abarbanell, Part 5 (May 20, 2013) and Meirav reported on a visit to the prisoners by the Palestinians, Abarbanell identifying the PFLP leader George Habash.

Although the Arab press almost unanimously lauded the hijackers (Middle East Record, vol. 4 [1968], p. 390), Bäumer to AA, Amman, July 31, 1968, PA AA AV Neues Amt/2350, reported the misgivings of the Jordanian and Egyptian governments as well as of the PFLP’s rival Fatah.

\textsuperscript{83} Middle East Record (1968), p. 391; Laskier, “Israel and Algeria,” p. 24.


the prisoners unconditionally by the end of the month, whereupon the boycott was called off. But Israel had also given way, agreeing to make a “humanitarian gesture” to Italy, but only after its plane and citizens had been freed. On August 21, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia drove news of the hijacking off the front pages, much to the chagrin of the impatient hostages. Ten days later, on August 31, despite two last-minute roadblocks, the Algiers government sent the El Al plane, crew, and passengers home via Rome, generating a euphoric response in Israel.

Yet behind the facade of an Arab retreat and Israeli victory was the murky reality. On September 3, Israel informed the International Red Cross that it was releasing sixteen Arab “infiltrators,” all captured before the June 1967 war, as a “gesture of gratitude for the efforts of the Italian government”; and after eleventh-hour negotiations between Rome and Jerusalem and a few changes in the list, sixteen Palestinians were freed between September 17 and October 18.

Not unexpectedly, there was an uproar on both sides: Hard-line Israeli officials and large segments of the Israeli press protested the concealed form of reciprocity and the government’s “surrender to terrorism,” and Arab governments and journalists were irate over Algeria’s capitulation and Israel’s refusal to release any post-1967 guerrilla fighters. Nonetheless, in the annals of twentieth-century hijackings, the outcome has generally been characterized as an “exchange.”

On Aug. 13, the International Transport Workers Union also announced that it would no longer service Algerian planes at major international airports.

Egypt, on Aug. 14, called for a counterboycott on all land, sea, and land transport of all countries backing the ban. Buerstedde to AA, Aden, Aug. 21, 1968, PA AA AV Neues Amt/2350.


90 Abarbanell, Meirav; the Algerians had given the hostages a radio, and they occasionally provided them with French and local newspapers.


Also on Sept. 13, 15, and 17, Algeria released the three PFLP hijackers separately, and ostensibly dispatched them to Lebanon. Middle East Record, vol. 4 (1968), p. 393.

93 Middle East Record, vol. 4 (1968), pp. 392 93.

There were other repercussions. Between 1968 and 1972, the world faced an explosion of airline hijackings, including more than a dozen by Palestinians.\(^95\) In 1968, Palestinian militants had challenged the UN’s treatment of their people as simply a “refugee problem,” and forced the world, and their enemy, to deal with their demands.\(^96\) Also, during the prolonged hijacking crisis the dispersed Palestinian groups suspended their rivalry, leading to the formation of a unified PLO under Arafat a year later. Finally, the Palestinians’ bold action enabled them to establish stronger ties with Communist and Third World allies.\(^97\)

Israel now faced an enemy prepared to strike at home and abroad.\(^98\) On September 3, the day Israel announced the release of the sixteen Palestinian prisoners, three bombs were detonated in Tel Aviv’s Central Bus Station, killing one and injuring scores of others.\(^99\) Four months later, on December 26, the PFLP blew up an El Al aircraft in Athens, killing one Israeli and injuring another.\(^100\) Not only did Israel find little sympathy in the world community for the victims of Palestinian terrorist attacks but it also received UN censure over its retaliatory air strikes on two Fatah bases in Jordan in August and on the Beirut airport in December.\(^101\) Unready to launch a peace initiative and increasingly on the defensive before world public opinion, Israel slipped deeper into violent conflict with the Palestinians over their competing national claims.

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98 Between 1948 and 1967, there had been unceasing but less organized *fedayeen* incursions and attacks inside Israel.


100 Details in *Middle East Record*, vol. 4 (1968), pp. 393–95.

Prague

For West Germany, a largely powerless bystander, the hijacking of El Al flight 426 raised new apprehensions about the Middle East cauldron, Western Europe’s vulnerability, and the Superpowers’ inability or unwillingness to restrain their clients, all of which endangered its Ostpolitik. Moreover, the hijacking crisis unfolded on the eve of a second, more dangerous shock far closer to home, when on the night of August 20–21 four Warsaw Pact countries invaded their Socialist ally Czechoslovakia to remove Alexander Dubček’s reformist government and replace it with a more compliant and orthodox Communist partner. This long-feared, but nonetheless unexpected military action had momentous consequences – halting Western attempts at bridge-building with the East and bolstering Moscow’s claims to dominate every Communist regime, to control the pace and contours of détente, and also to wield decisive power over the German future.

The Federal Republic was stunned by the invasion, which was not only a brutal assault on Czechoslovakia’s sovereignty but also a direct blow to its yearlong effort to establish closer ties with its Communist neighbor. In the spring, in response to signals from Prague, the Bonn government had entered into negotiations to establish full diplomatic ties on the model of Romania and Yugoslavia; and indeed the Czechoslovak side had proposed a specific timetable, coinciding with the Fourteenth Party Congress scheduled on September 9 and the thirtieth anniversary of the Munich agreement on September 30. The official and informal talks, which extended until the very week of the invasion, included not only diplomatic exchanges in Prague and in Bonn, but also visits by SPD, CDU, and FDP parliamentarians and by Bundesbank President Otto Blessing to the

Czech capital. These dealings with the Dubček government were undoubtedly important to Bonn; set deftly within a European framework, they offered the possibility of disrupting the so-called “iron triangle”: the Soviet-sponsored alignment constructed a year earlier between Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Poland to resist its Ostpolitik.

To be sure, there were at least two major barriers separating West Germany and Czechoslovakia. The first was their disagreement over the legal and political legacy of Munich, which affected the citizenship and the claims of some three million expellees from Czechoslovakia who formed an influential bloc in the Federal Republic. The second was their clash over German reunification, and the Dubček government’s insistence on the necessity of “two German states.” Although the leading Czechoslovak reformers were eager to engage the “realistic” forces in the FRG and actively sought their economic assistance as well as closer ties with the

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Among the projects discussed in Prague were those involving joint aid in the developing world: Eppler, Bericht für das Entwicklungsministerium, Aug. 5, 1968, PA AA B58/III/81/850.

107 One example: On July 22, the Auswärtiges Amt approved a proposal by the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg (headed by the West German jurist Ulrich Mayer Cording) to finance construction of a Prague Nuremberg autobahn. PA AA B2/176.


EEC (and also welcomed the upsurge of tourism – some 368,000 West German visitors in the first half of 1968\textsuperscript{110}), there were still hard-line Czech and Slovak Communists in powerful positions who were outraged over a betrayal of the GDR and over consorting with the long-reviled capitalist neighbor that harbored “neo-Nazis and revanchists.”\textsuperscript{111}

Not unexpectedly, West German leaders were exceptionally circumspect in depicting their negotiations with the Dubček government. Although sympathetic with the goals of the Prague reformers, Kiesinger and Brandt were also sensitive to their interlocutors’ precarious position vis-à-vis Moscow and therefore avoided any statement or action that might risk a Soviet reprisal.\textsuperscript{112} Thus in July, on Brandt’s recommendation, Kiesinger ordered the Defense Ministry to shift the Bundeswehr’s September maneuvers away from the Czech border;\textsuperscript{113} and thus Brandt and Kiesinger’s repeated public assurances of non-interference in the events in Czechoslovakia. According to Brandt, “The best thing the FRG could do for Czechoslovakia was nothing at all.”\textsuperscript{114}

Nonetheless, throughout the spring and summer of 1968 the Soviet Union, Poland, and East Germany, alarmed by the cascading political changes in Prague, had castigated Bonn’s “revanchist” schemes to split the Warsaw Pact, weaken the GDR, and wield its economic power to dominate East Central Europe; and on August 21 the Soviet news agency TASS characterized the invasion not only as a strike against the “counter-revolutionary forces” in Czechoslovakia, which had endangered the USSR and its allies, but also as a defense against the “forces of militarism, aggression and revanchism” that had plunged Europe into war.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{110} Der Spiegel, Aug. 5, 1968. Among the visitors was Rudi Dutschke, who came to Prague in the beginning of April as part of a West Berlin student delegation to the Christian Peace Conference and also delivered a fiery anti capitalist address to students at the Charles University.


\textsuperscript{113} Brandt to Kiesinger, July 24, 1968, AdsD WBA A7/13; Der Spiegel, Aug. 5, 1968. In his letter, Brandt also urged Kiesinger not to attend the Sudeten German rally that had been proposed for the end of Aug.

\textsuperscript{114} Der Spiegel, Aug. 5, 1968; Werner Höfer, “War Bonn Mitschuldig?” Die Zeit, Dec. 6, 1968. There are still gaps in our knowledge of the FRG’s formal and informal activities in Prague before the Aug. 21 invasion as well as the degree to which Kiesinger was included: Schwarz, “Die Regierung Kiesinger,” p. 172.

\textsuperscript{115} Reprinted in Neues Deutschland (Aug. 21, 1968) and Europa Archiv 18 (1968): D 428. According to the Czechoslovak Soviet communiqué drafted in Moscow on Oct. 4, the purpose of the invasion was to create a “solid defensive wall against the constantly expanding West German revanchist military forces.” Rudé Právo, Oct. 5, quoted in Müller, “Die Haltung der ČSSR,” p. 266.

Once more Bonn found itself isolated on August 21, 1968. French president Charles de Gaulle not only refused to defend his ally against Soviet charges but also faulted West German activities in Prague and justified the Soviets’ “defensive” move.\footnote{Braun to AA, Paris, Aug. 21, 1968, Kiesinger Seydoux meeting, Bonn, Aug. 30, 1968, Brandt Debré meeting, Sept. 7, 1968, Kiesinger de Gaulle meeting, Paris, Sept. 27, 1968, Brandt Debré meeting, Sept. 27, Deutsch Französische Konsultationsbesprechung, Sept. 27, 1968, Kiesinger de Gaulle meeting, Sept. 28, 1968, AAPD 1968 2:1037 40, 1061 66, 1103 77, 1200 1212, 1214 19, 1219 27, 1248 52. See also Carine Germond, “Charles de Gaulle and the Grand Coalition’s ‘Ostpolitik,’ 1966 1969,” \textit{Francia} (2010): 249 52.} The Johnson administration, absorbed in the Vietnam negotiations, widespread urban unrest, and the impending Democratic National Convention – and restrained by the lame-duck president’s hope to attend the October Leningrad summit meeting with Kosygin – issued a mild protest but was unwilling to risk a major confrontation over Czechoslovakia.\footnote{Kiesinger Lodge meeting, Aug. 21, 1968, AAPD 1968 2:1029 32; Adam Bromke, “Czechoslovakia and the World: 1968,” \textit{Canadian Slavonic Papers} 10, no. 4 (Winter 1968): 588 90; Günter Bischof, “No Action: The Johnson Administration and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia,” in Bischof, Karner, and Ruggenthaler, eds., \textit{The Prague Spring}, pp. 215 36.} British prime minister Harold Wilson, pressed by the British Parliament and public, placed a resolution before the Security Council condemning the invasion (which was promptly vetoed by the USSR); but the Labour government, convinced that Moscow had no aggressive aims against Western Europe, was also unready to take stiffer measures that would “annoy the Soviets” or damage its commercial contacts in Eastern Europe.\footnote{Geraint Hughes, “British Policy towards Eastern Europe and the Impact of the Prague Spring, 1964 1968,” \textit{Cold War History} 4, no. 2 (Jan. 2004): 123 29.} And NATO’s response was similarly disappointing: While the Prague Spring was
unfolding, the alliance focused on repairing its internal disputes and easing tensions with the East;\textsuperscript{121} after the invasion, NATO took no steps to strengthen its forces.\textsuperscript{122}

Faced with this brutal demonstration of a divided Germany and Europe, the FRG’s vulnerability to Soviet pressure, and its allies’ inaction, the Grand Coalition pulled together after August 21. Kiesinger and Brandt both reaffirmed their commitment to ease tensions in Europe.\textsuperscript{123} Having reached the limit of its campaign to prove itself a “trustworthy” partner to its neighbors, Bonn drew several conclusions: (1) that the Soviet Union, despite (or even because of) its growing economic weakness, mounting rivalry with China, and diminished ideological appeal in the Third World, would not relinquish its hegemony over Eastern Europe and would demand a heavy price for countenancing Ostpolitik, including West Germany’s acceptance of the territorial status quo; (2) that achieving peace in Europe would require a non-interference policy in the internal affairs of its Communist neighbors, which would include maintaining a strict distance from reformist forces; and (3) that coordinating its next initiatives with its allies would likely be less productive than acting independently. Ostpolitik could thus continue only through a direct approach to Moscow, combining Bonn’s acceptance of the status quo with practical proposals to bring Europe closer together.\textsuperscript{124}

The crushing of the Prague Spring and the shutdown of Bonn’s small-steps policy toward its Communist neighbors would also widen the Grand Coalition’s existing differences over Ostpolitik. After August 20, Brandt, spurred by his top foreign policy advisor Egon Bahr, opted for realism; thus at his October 8 UN meeting with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, he gritted his teeth and signaled his readiness to discuss a long

\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, NATO’s most powerful member, now with 500,000 troops in Vietnam, was stretched thin in the European theater (and in the process of removing soldiers and military equipment from the continent). NATO’s hands off policy toward the events in Czechoslovakia was also dictated by two other factors: the West’s bad memories of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, and the impact of the protest movements throughout Western Europe that had included denunciations of Cold War militancy. John G. McGinn, “The Politics of Collective Inaction: NATO’s Response to the Prague Spring,” \textit{Journal of Cold War Studies} 1, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 111–38.


list of Soviet territorial and political demands, including Bonn’s signature on the NPT. But Kiesinger, responding to majority CDU/CSU opinion and public outrage over the Soviet crackdown as well as to new signals from Washington, refused any further concessions to Moscow. The divergence would grow stronger in January 1969 after Moscow, having consolidated its control of Eastern Europe, suddenly indicated its readiness to improve relations with Bonn.

Israel was also stunned by the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which its Arab neighbors had immediately applauded. In Czechoslovakia, despite its Communist regime, Israel recognized a kindred small state that had provided indispensable military aid in 1948. Many of the authors of the Prague Spring not only were advocates of a humanist and democratic socialism but had also cheered Israel’s 1967 victory over its Soviet-armed enemies and openly contested their government’s anti-Zionist line. In April 1968, one of the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s cautious expressions of independence from the Kremlin was the elimination of its formerly hostile stance toward Israel. There had also been a marked liberalization of the Prague government’s policies toward Czech and Slovak Jews.

The Eshkol government issued a strong response. Echoing the opponents of détente, Israel protested an “outrageous violation” of the UN Charter. “The sanctified principles of political independence and territorial integrity, peaceful coexistence, nonintervention in the internal affairs of states, the right of every state, small or large, to security and

128 But which also diverted the world’s attention away from Algiers.
freedom, the principles on which relations between states are based; all have been trampled upon arbitrarily.”

And referring to the press reports of East German involvement in the invasion (which later proved erroneous), it added that “the participation of German troops in the invasion and occupation” had aroused “particularly terrible memories.”

Recoiling from this collective accusation, Bonn cautioned Israel not to exaggerate the German element or undermine West Germany’s “ongoing efforts to remove tensions with the East” — including its temporarily suspended contacts with the GDR — whose goal was to maintain “the unity of the nation.”

**Aftermath**

Following the twin crises in the summer of 1968, West Germany and Israel moved further apart. On October 11, 1968, three days after his conciliatory talk with Gromyko, Brandt met briefly with Abba Eban, who assumed a strong anti-Soviet stance. Eban not only blamed Moscow for Egypt’s refusal to negotiate and deplored the Soviets’ propagandistic tirades against Israel’s “Nazi” behavior; he also accused the West of a dangerously “weak” response to the invasion of Czechoslovakia and for failing to oppose Moscow’s “calculated risk.”

Issues regarding the past still brought some West Germans and Israelis together. In the fall of 1968, Israel hosted two high-profile guests: Ernst Benda, the CDU minister of the interior and president of the German–Israeli Association, and Gustav Heinemann, the SPD justice minister and the expected presidential candidate, both strong partisans of extending the Federal Republic’s Statute of Limitations for Nazi acts of murder, which was due to expire at the end of 1969. Israel, which up to then had kept an extremely low profile over this contentious issue,
welcomed these visits by two outspokenly friendly cabinet ministers; but the Auswärtiges Amt, sensitive to Arab opinion, did its best to underplay them.138

The Arab boycott continued to raise tensions. Israel, which by the end of 1968 had greatly expanded its presence in the developing countries in Africa and Latin America, was increasingly sensitive to the behavior of German companies.139 Another dispute had erupted that summer when the oil and gas exploration company Prakla which, together with the Federal Economics Ministry, had concluded an agreement with the Israeli government firm Lapidoth, suddenly withdrew on August 8; facing Israeli threats of an anti-German press campaign, Bonn devised a “practical” solution.140 But in the fall there were more Israeli protests – over the Economics Ministry’s circulation of Arab boycott materials to German export firms, over the government’s refusal to outlaw the boycott, and, especially, over the electronics firm Siemens’s refusal to enter a business partnership of great importance to Israel. Karl Hermann Knoke, the new German ambassador in Tel Aviv, urged his government to end its “passive” stance toward Arab intimidation or risk a serious deterioration in West German–Israeli relations.141

Bonn officials, however, were unwilling to take action. Following Schiller’s direction, the Economics Ministry, which termed the boycott a “regrettable reality,” insisted on the need to allow West Germany’s export industries, already losing business in the Arab world to Communist and West European competitors, to protect their interests. And although four years earlier the Auswärtiges Amt had condemned the boycott, its officials resented Israel’s exclusive pressure on Bonn and insisted that the problem required an “international solution.”142

In a broader sense, these stiffer positions reflected the diminution of pro-Israeli sentiments within West Germany. And ahead were the 1969 elections in both countries that would decide their respective directions.

139 Aufzeichnungen: Stand des Wirtschaftsboycotts der Arabischen Liga gegen Israel; and Die Massnahmen der Arabischen Liga zum Wirtschaftsboykott Israels, Sept. 24, 1968, PA AA B102/168333.
140 Schiller and Schmücker to Brandt, Oct. 1, 1968, PA AA B30/423c; Knoke to AA, Oct. 30, 1968, AAPD 1968 2:1415. Bonn’s solution was to create an entirely new, publicly subsidized company, to which Israel agreed.
142 Communications in Ibid., p. 1416, nn. 7, 8.
The predicament of Israel’s diplomacy lay in the tension between [a] solitary quest for security and a constant ambition for international support.1

Our relationship with Israel is the same as with other countries. ... We have replaced contractual agreements based upon the past with normal cooperation.2

On March 24, 1969, there was a festive occasion in Jerusalem, but one that also exposed the continuing tension between West Germans and Israelis. That day the media magnate Axel Springer took part in the dedication of the Israel Museum’s new Library of Art and Archaeology, to which he had donated the sum of $1 million. The three-story, stone-and-glass structure, whose construction had been delayed by the outbreak of the June 1967 war, was finished almost on schedule and would house up to one hundred thousand volumes; it also included an auditorium for major public programs.3 At the podium of the new auditorium, Springer acknowledged the controversy his gift had stirred: On his first visit in 1966, he had intended to make a substantial gesture to “overcome the past”; but upon learning of the outcry over attaching a German name to a major Israeli cultural institution, he had graciously accepted anonymity – “to be a helper without any acknowledgment.” Springer also recognized that the “unspeakable deeds perpetrated in Germany’s name” could “never be undone or overcome, nor [could there be] restitution in the true sense of the word.” Nonetheless, he staked his claim to be one of Israel’s foremost supporters: “One thing remains – to use the historic chance which I have been granted to stand fast by the state of Israel through all its adversity.”4

Springer and his gift remained contentious. Despite their pride in this handsome new cultural institution, many Israelis remained uncomfortable with Springer and his politics. No government official attended the ceremony; and on that day some twenty-five left-wing students from the Hebrew University marched quietly in the streets outside the museum with signs reading “Springer out” and denouncing the alliance between the conservative West German millionaire and his Israeli friends.5

Washington and Moscow

On the global scene, 1969 was a year in which the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union took on an entirely new character: the onset of Superpower détente. After two decades of global rivalry, neither side had triumphed, and both were suffering the wages of the worldwide economic slowdown, exacerbated by their extravagant military expenditures in Europe and beyond. The United States was still mired in Vietnam, and the USSR faced the heavy costs of its invasion of Czechoslovakia. Increasingly incapable of dominating their allies, and baffled by the clash of their domestic, regional, and global interests, Washington and Moscow sought a way to defuse their rivalry and create more stable conditions in the world.

The authors of this shift were the newly elected US president, the fifty-six-year-old Cold Warrior Richard Nixon, and the sixty-three-year-old CPSU general secretary Leonid Brezhnev, who had just ordered the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1969, this unlikely pair took the first steps toward nuclear disarmament, ground-force reductions in Europe, and bilateral trade agreements, and also contemplated an accord in order to avoid unintended confrontations in the Third World.6

But Nixon’s call for an “era of negotiations” was also predicated on the principle of linkage: the use of America’s economic and military strength with a mix of pressures and incentives to convince Moscow to cooperate in areas of special concern to Washington. Not unexpectedly, the quest for détente found its limits in the Middle East, one of the world’s most heavily armed arenas still seething with the effects of the 1967 war. Although both Washington and Moscow sought a peace settlement, as major arms suppliers to the Israelis and Arabs as well as their indispensable political supporters, the Superpowers could neither force their fractious clients to the conference table nor formulate a peace plan

acceptable to all sides. They also faced pressure from French president Charles de Gaulle to convene a Four Power conference, something Washington and London strongly opposed.


Israel and West Germany

On the morning of February 26, 1969, Israel was stunned when Levi Eshkol died of a heart attack. Although the seventy-three-year-old prime minister had been in poor health for some time, the passing of one of the last of the founders’ generation appeared to mark the close of an era – as exemplified by the naming of his fifty-year-old deputy, Yigal Allon, as acting premier. Eshkol, a modest figure with extraordinary talents as a mediator, had also displayed toughness, for example, in the bitter break with his mentor David Ben-Gurion and in his initially hesitant, but ultimately firm leadership during and after the June 1967 war. Moreover, Eshkol had played a significant role in Israeli–West German relations. Although far less favorable toward Bonn than his predecessor, for twelve years as Israel’s finance minister he had doggedly implemented the 1952 Restitution Agreement, and as prime minister he had maintained a steady hand over the complicated diplomatic relationship that was established in 1965.

Five days later on March 3 came the surprise announcement that the Labor Party leadership had chosen Golda Meir, the seventy-year-old former foreign minister and recently retired party chief, to replace Eshkol. The appointment was widely regarded as a temporary one in order to maintain national unity until the October general elections and to stave off the bitter rivalry between the two younger party heroes, Allon and Moshe Dayan. But the return of Meir, a blunt politician with a long and successful record in national and international affairs who became Israel’s fourth (and first female) prime minister on March 17, 1969, was far more than a convenient stopgap. By blocking Dayan, the nonconformist fifty-three-year-old defense minister (who had surprisingly failed to contest the party chiefs’ decision), Meir’s accession represented a major political victory for the Mapai old guard, and she kept the same team as her predecessor. At her first news conference on March 18, while professing her personal desire for peace, Meir adroitly adopted Dayan and
Allon’s hard-line terms, insisting on direct negotiations between the warring parties and frontier adjustments with Egypt and Jordan (the code terms were “secured, recognized, and agreed-upon borders”) to ensure Israel’s security.  

Earlier that month, the Federal Republic had also undergone a political change: On March 5 the Electoral College, composed of members of the Bundestag and representatives of the eleven Bundesländer, after an unprecedented three ballots narrowly elected justice minister Gustav Heinemann to the presidency for a five-year term beginning on July 1, the first Social Democrat to occupy the office since 1925.  

Although the position was a largely ceremonial one, the vote – occurring only six months before the September national elections – mirrored the split in the Grand Coalition and also an emerging new alignment: By casting their ballots for Heinemann, the opposition Free Democrats, led by their new and more liberal chief, Walter Scheel, signaled their readiness to break with their past association with the CDU, form a government with the SPD, and share in the pursuit a more active Ostpolitik.  

The selection of the sixty-nine-year-old Heinemann also had a larger significance in the history of the FRG. A left-wing liberal, Heinemann was one of the country’s most respected public figures. A descendent of 1848 revolutionaries and former corporate lawyer, Heinemann was a man of stronger religious convictions than political attachments; he had been a member of four parties before joining the SPD in 1957. As a proponent of a conscience-driven West German civil society, he had earlier taken stands against West German rearmament and the acquisition of nuclear weapons, and as justice minister in the Grand Coalition he had opposed the death penalty, taken steps to reform the penal code, and drafted the law extending the Statute of Limitations against prosecuting those who had committed murder during the Nazi regime.

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Moreover, there were strong political differences between the two presidential candidates: Heinemann’s CDU/CSU opponent, the fifty-eight-year-old Gerhard Schröder – the current defense minister and former foreign and interior minister as well as open aspirant for the chancellorship – had been a Nazi Party and Sturmabteilung member and he had come close to victory on March 5 with twenty-two votes from the right-wing National Democratic Party. For many West Germans, Schröder’s narrow defeat (the vote was 512–506) represented a fundamental changing of the guard.15

The new Israeli and German leaders drew mixed responses abroad. The Great Powers, seeking an Arab-Israeli peace settlement, were wary of Meir’s reportedly uncompromising views.16 By contrast, Heinemann’s election brought cautious praise from Washington and Moscow.17 The Israeli public, although consumed with Eshkol’s succession, was also gratified by the results: the triumph of “democratic forces in the new West Germany.”18 Israelis considered Schröder – with his Nazi past, pro-Arab views, and opposition to providing gas masks on the eve of the June 1967 war – an unsympathetic figure, whereas Heinemann, who had openly supported Israeli positions during his unusually long eight-day visit in November, was regarded as a friend.19

A New War

Just as political changes were occurring in Jerusalem and Bonn, another war erupted in the Middle East, one that would last for seventeen months. Rearmed by the Soviet Union, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser was determined to defy Israeli intransigency, flout the Great Powers’ indecisiveness, and overturn an increasingly debilitating status quo. Following almost a year of intermittent Egyptian-Israeli clashes across

In one of his first presidential acts, on August 4, 1969, Heinemann signed the bill extending the Statute of Limitations on the prosecution of all Nazi murderers until Dec. 30, 1979.

16 Evans to Hanbury Tenison, Bonn, July 25, 1969, GB NA FCO 17/739.
17 Eppler to Brandt, Bonn, Mar. 7, 1969, PA AA B36/361.
18 Ma’ariv editorial Mar. 6, 1969; Davar editorial, Mar. 7, 1969; also Davar article, Mar. 8, 1969.
19 Knoke to AA, Nov. 11, 1968, PA AA B36/461, on the glowing response to Heinemann’s visit. The East German government had also noted Heinemann’s pro Israel stance: Zum Verhältnis zwischen der BRD und Israel, January 30, 1969; BAL Büro Ulbricht DY 30 3500.
the Suez Canal, on March 8 the Egyptian president officially renounced the UN-brokered cease-fire and launched what he described as a “War of Attrition,” aimed at inflicting unendurable casualties on the enemy, compelling Israel to withdraw from the Sinai, and also drawing in outside powers to mediate the conflict.20

For Israel, the War of Attrition was an entirely new experience: a defensive struggle fought on occupied territory some three hundred kilometers from its borders. Unlike the conflicts in 1948, 1956, and 1967 when its troops and tanks, shielded by an expertly piloted air force, had moved rapidly across the battlefronts, Israel now risked all the dangers of immobility: Along a 150-kilometer front, its string of lightly protected fortresses on the Bar Lev line (named after its chief of staff) and patrols were vulnerable to continuous assaults by Egyptian artillery, nighttime raids, and mine-laying expeditions along with the threat of a full-scale crossing of the Suez Canal.21

That summer Israel hit back. Faced with mounting casualties and growing public inquietude, it sent the air force into combat against the Egyptian MiGs and on bombing raids against Egyptian missile sites and artillery batteries, and it also launched a series of daring commando raids on Egyptian military targets. However, despite the pleas of Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the 1967 victory and current ambassador in Washington, to strike the Egyptian hinterland and force Nasser to call off the War of Attrition, the Meir government hesitated to antagonize Washington or to goad the Soviets to retaliate.22

Once more, the Superpowers had been caught flat-footed. For the Soviet Union, reeling from China’s attack on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island in March 1969 and the start of a nine-month border conflict with its huge nuclear-armed neighbor, a new Middle East war was highly unwelcome. Moscow, which had not been consulted by Nasser and strongly opposed his gambit, continued to provide arms and diplomatic support to an ally that had granted it crucial Mediterranean air and naval bases.23 On the other hand, the United States, which was still bogged down in Vietnam – and hoping for Soviet help with a settlement – had yet to develop a coherent Middle East policy. Torn in two directions, the Nixon administration wavered between the State Department’s effort to

22 Ibid., pp. 165 72.
regain US standing in the Arab world by assuming a more evenhanded policy toward the combatants, and the more hawkish views of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who urged full-scale support to Israeli efforts to topple Nasser in the hope of gaining a less bellicose successor, while also continuing to supply weapons to Israel.24 Adding to the Superpowers’ dilemma was France’s demand to launch Four Power talks on the Middle East.25

The War of Attrition not only was costly for both sides in terms of casualties and resources but also had significant political consequences. During the nine-month hiatus in Superpower intervention, the hawks in Egypt and Israel were energized. And as the war continued into the fall of 1969, not only did the archenemies Nasser and Meir escalate their aggressive verbiage and consolidate power at home; through their respective personal visits to Moscow and Washington both were able to extract additional political and military support from Brezhnev and Nixon.26

Israeli society was shaken by the war: The euphoria of two years earlier had evaporated. Although Israel’s population and economy were expanding, so were its defense expenditures, which now consumed more than one-third of revenues. Also the country was increasingly isolated abroad: The Soviet Union was conducting a ferocious anti-Zionist campaign; France, despite its change of government in April, refused to release already purchased jet parts but was selling Mirage jets to Libya (which were certain to be transshipped to Egypt); and in the United Nations, six of the fifteen Security Council members had no diplomatic relations with Israel.27

Along with the new military struggle with Egypt and the border skirmishes with Syria, Israel faced an escalation of Palestinian terrorist attacks abroad.28 These challenges reinforced the Meir government’s determination to hold on to the occupied territories until its Arab enemies acknowledged defeat and accepted peace on its terms: a stance that also


26 Korn, Stalemate, pp. 188, 189, 190, 91, 250, 52 (Nasser), 158, 172, 198 (Meir).

27 Knoke to AA, Tel Aviv, Mar. 17, Apr. 29, July 11, 1969, PA AA B36/466.

28 Among them: the Feb. 18, 1969, attack on an El Al plane at the Zurich airport; the May 22 attempted assassination of Ben Gurion and the Aug. 18 attack on the Israeli Government Tourist Office in Copenhagen; the Aug. 29 hijacking of a TWA flight from Los Angeles to Tel Aviv; and the three Sept. 8 coordinated bomb attacks on Israeli embassies in Bonn and The Hague and on the El Al bureau in Brussels.
strengthened its position before the Israeli public on the eve of the October elections. To be sure, the prospects for a Middle East peace, once considered bright in 1967, had been greatly reduced by the facts being created on the ground: by the military emplacements in the Golan, the Jordan valley, and the Sinai, and by the growing number of settlements on the West Bank.

**West Germany: The East German Coup**

While Israel was plunging into a new war, the Federal Republic in the spring and summer of 1969 also received a shock when five Arab governments suddenly announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with its archenemy East Germany: Iraq on April 30, Sudan on May 28, Syria on June 5, South Yemen on June 30, and finally Egypt on July 10. Not only had West Germany’s two-year-long efforts to restore its ties with these countries become more difficult, its decade-and-a-half global campaign to isolate its Communist neighbor and claim sole representation of the entire German people had also been breached.29

With these dramatic steps, the German Democratic Republic – preparing to celebrate its twentieth anniversary in October 1969 – had reversed its position in the Third World as a pariah and a supplicant unable to match West Germany’s greater economic and political power and influence among the non-aligned states.30 East Berlin’s recognition campaign in the Middle East, which began with Ulbricht’s splashy visit to Egypt in 1965, had expanded into whole-hearted support of the Arab cause, including the dispatch of emissaries and large sums to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Algeria after the June 1967 war.31 Bolstered by the Soviets’ endorsement – and Bonn’s diplomatic absence from the major

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29 William Glenn Gray, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949 1969* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 209–19. Moreover, Cambodia’s May 8 recognition announcement plunged the increasingly contentious Grand Coalition into a new crisis over the prospect of two German embassies in Phnom Penh; however, it was solved when Prince Sihanouk broke diplomatic ties with the FRG on June 11, ibid., p. 212.


Arab capitals – the GDR in 1969 was also able to capitalize on the unsettled conditions in the Middle East: the stalled peace process, the appearance of radical regimes in Syria and Iraq, and the intense rivalries among the major Arab governments. To be sure, Ulbricht had to pay a high price for winning Arab acceptance of two German states in the form of generous loans, arms, and aid packages to Baghdad, Khartoum, Damascus, Aden, and Cairo, expenditures that would burden the already beleaguered GDR economy.

Although West German leaders reacted calmly to the cascade of recognitions, they recognized that their country’s position in the Middle East had deteriorated and that they lacked the means to recoup the damage. As a non-UN member, the FRG exerted no political influence over settling the region’s conflicts; and its claim to neutrality was under constant challenge, not only because of its generous annual aid packages to Israel but also because of continuing Soviet and Arab charges of its alleged arms deliveries. In addition, Bonn possessed little leverage to halt the GDR’s demarches in the Arab world: It was reluctant to enter an economic bidding war and disinclined to use threats – for example, to abandon its neutrality and tip politically and militarily toward Israel. Hence, in response to the GDR’s breakthrough the West German cabinet, after a heated discussion on May 29, devised a formula providing the maximum leeway for dealing with third-party arrangements with East Germany: Although the FRG would “consider the recognition of the GDR as an unfriendly act” – “contrary to the right of the German people to self-determination” – its response would take account of “the interests of the German people and the circumstances.”

Ulbricht’s triumphs, on the eve of the West German national elections, occurred at a highly fraught moment for the Grand Coalition. Faced with a largely unfinished domestic agenda, the alignment was unraveling: The chancellor and foreign minister were at odds over major internal

33 Gray, Germany’s Cold War, pp. 213 16; Sodaro, “The GDR and the Third World,” pp. 109 16.
and foreign policy issues, thus threatening to aid the radical-right NPD’s electoral prospects.  

Moreover, with the exit of French president Charles de Gaulle, Bonn had suddenly moved into the European spotlight, although East Germany’s emergence from the diplomatic nether world had also forced the FRG to acknowledge its stalled Ostpolitik. On the other hand, a new prospect had opened in March: The Warsaw Pact’s Budapest Declaration calling for improved East-West relations and the convocation of a European Security Conference had signaled the Soviet Union’s willingness to abandon its hostile stance in return for the FRG’s ending its two-decades-long rejection of the GDR.

It was on this core national issue that Brandt and Kiesinger took opposite sides, with the SPD leader prepared to defer German unification in order to lay the basis for European détente and security for West Berlin, and the CDU chief adhering to his party’s hard-line Cold War stance toward the East. The result would be an edgy several-months-long holding action toward the GDR, the Soviet Union, and Bonn’s NATO partners until the West German public made its decision on September 28.

Working Together?

With elections pending in both countries, 1969 promised to be a relatively uneventful period in West German–Israeli relations. Trade between the two countries had recently expanded (although still with a significant Israeli deficit); and there was also a marked increase in official and private visits and cultural exchanges. The year’s highlights included the Bundesrat president Dr. Hermann Weichmann’s attendance at Levi Eshkol’s funeral and his friendly tête-à-tête with acting prime minister.

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37 Brandt to Kiesinger, May 21, 1969, AAPD 1969 1:618 19; Brandt to Duckwitz (for Kiesinger), May 24, 1969, ibid., 1:640; also Baring and Görtemaker, Machtwechsel, pp. 139 47; Gray, Germany’s Cold War, pp. 209 12.


40 Details for the period 1960–1969 in BayHStA, StK15278.
Allon; Ambassador Hermann Knoke’s eloquent remarks at the Israel Museum Library dedication; the arrival of the first Israeli parliamentary delegation in West Germany; and the participation of prominent West German journalists in a Tel Aviv seminar.

Israel’s focus on the Nazi past continued to create tension with West Germany, a country whose chancellor had been a former party member and whose high officials included many servants of the Third Reich, but whose burgeoning youth population felt little connection with their parents’ crimes. In the UN Human Rights Council, Israel joined the Communist bloc’s condemnations of the Nazi holdovers in the Federal Republic and the menace of its neo-Nazi movements. Israeli officials, alarmed over the prospect of an NPD entry into the Bundestag with some twenty-five to fifty seats, pleaded quietly (and unsuccessfully) for the Bonn government to outlaw the party.

In early 1969, Israel changed course and joined the international pressure on Bonn to extend the Statute of Limitations on the Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals, which was due to expire at the end of the year. This highly divisive issue pitted the two Grand Coalition parties against each other and had raised a major public debate. Although the cabinet, after a heated two-day session in April, voted to extend the statute, and the Bundestag ratified the bill two months later, there was a domestic and international outcry over

41 Knoke to AA, Tel Aviv, Mar. 3, 1969, PA AA B36 465; Weichmann, a Jew who had returned to Germany from the United States in 1948 and was one of the FRG’s most esteemed politicians, had declined to run for the presidency in 1969 as a bipartisan candidate. New York Times, Apr. 25, 1969.
42 Ma’ariv, Mar. 25, 1969.
43 Vermerk, Mar. 25, 1969, PA AA 2 B 36/461. Heinemann had extended the invitation during his Nov. 1968 visit to Israel.
44 Ben Horin to FM, Bonn, May 26, 1969, AE C001 7/188.
45 Schuster to AJC New York, Paris, Jan. 15, 1969, YIVO RG 347.7.1 Box 21 AJC FAD 1: 68 69.
46 Keller to AA, New York, Jan. 23, Mar. 7, 8, 1979, PA AA B30/511.
47 Brandt to Kiesinger, Bonn, Jan. 7, 1969, Osterheld Vermerk, Jan. 14, 1969, BAK B136/ 3636; Ben Horin to FM, Apr. 13, 1969, ISA 130 4184/3; Ben Horin to Eban, May 26, 1969, AE C001 7/188. Rather than issue a ban and risk drawn out proceedings before the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe that would not end before the September elections, the cabinet decided to give West German voters the chance to repudiate the NPD with their ballots. Dr. Hans Lamm, Observations on the Present Situation in the FRG, Apr. 20, 1929, YIVO RG 347.7.1 Box 21 AJC FAD 1: 68 69.
48 Kiesinger/Ben Natan discussion, Feb. 7, 1969, AAPD 1969 1:161. Although there were some 10,000 pending cases in the German courts and some 70,000 others under investigation, the majority of CDU/CSU Cabinet members opposed the extension, while the SPD, cognizant of strong domestic and international imperatives, strongly supported the draft law, which had been drafted eight months earlier by Heinemann and was vigorously defended by the new Justice Minister Horst Ehmke.
Kiesinger’s proposal for a “differentiated” treatment of “racially motivated” murderers and their “accomplices.”\(^49\) And although the chancellor’s initiative had failed, in May came the shocking revelation that a new legal loophole had crept into the West German penal code that would now make it more difficult to bring “assistants” and “desk killers” to justice.\(^50\)

Yet Israeli policy makers also recognized the risks of intervening too forcefully in West German politics, losing the support of their friends, and stirring a nationalist backlash.\(^51\) Thus, at the height of Germany’s heavily contested election campaign, the foreign ministry would warn Ben-Natan against appearing before CDU audiences and also advised him to tone down his very public friendship with the CSU leader and finance minister Franz Josef Strauss.\(^52\)

On the West German side, relations with Israel were increasingly viewed through the prism of Bonn’s attempt to regain its standing in the Arab world.\(^53\) To underscore its neutrality, the government placed official visits to the Middle East under strict scrutiny.\(^54\) Kiesinger fended off Israeli requests to represent its interests in his talks in London, Paris, and Washington, emphasizing his lack of influence in the Middle East and Bonn’s neutral position.\(^55\) And Rolf Pauls’s presence at the West German


\(^50\) On May 21, the West German Supreme Court raised a national and international outcry when it reversed the conviction of the former SS officer Hermann Heinrich, convicted of shooting Jewish prisoners, because he had “acted under orders.” *New York Times*, May 22, 1969. Avner to Lapidot, Sept. 7, 1969 (responding to protests by the National Union of Israeli students), AE C001/0241; *American Jewish Year Book* (1970), pp. 449 50.

\(^51\) Ben Horin to FM, Bonn, Apr. 13, 1969, ISA 130 4184/3a\(^5\).

\(^52\) FM to Ben Natan, Aug. 28, 29, Ben Natan to FM, Sept. 1, ISA 130.23 4184/27a\(^5\).

\(^53\) See Kiesinger statement to CDU fraction, Jan. 21, 1969, ACDP CDU/CSU Bundestagfraktion 1965 69 024/2.

\(^54\) Sterken Aufzeichnung, Jan. 11, 1969, BAK B106/34275.

embassy in Washington helped the FRG maintain its “calm” impartial stance.56

There was one concern both countries shared: the issue of growing student protests and violence in West Germany. In the summer of 1969, Ben-Natan’s speeches at the universities of Frankfurt and Hamburg were disrupted by left-wing German students who were joined by hundreds of Arabs and also a handful of Israeli members of the radical group Kompass shouting threats to the ambassador.57 Israel’s reaction was swift and censorious; and Ben-Natan, who lashed out publicly at the demonstrators,

56 Milton Friedman, “Capital Spotlight” (JTA Wire Service, July 16, 1969), depicted Pauls’s presence as a “blessing” to the Bonn government.
characterized his young opponents as “left-wing fascists.” For the first time, the tiny West German Jewish community also contemplated political action in self-defense against the anti-Zionist ruffians in the schools and universities.

The West German press and public immediately deplored the incidents, and a deeply embarrassed Bonn government assured the world that “no antisemitism was involved” and that it was capable of protecting foreign diplomats. But when Ben-Natan, after rejecting the Auswärtiges Amt’s advice, faced another disruption in Nuremberg the following month, he was forced to discontinue his public appearances. That summer the rash of swastikas painted on Jewish institutions and on the walls of the Israeli embassy drew more outrage in the West German, Israeli, and world press. Worse was to come: On September 8, a grenade was thrown into the Israeli embassy in Bonn, and on November 11 and December 12 time bombs were placed in the Jewish Community Center and in the El Al office in West Berlin.

On a more contentious issue – the allocation of additional payments to Holocaust survivors – Bonn was less forthcoming. In the spring of 1969, Nahum Goldmann, head of both the Claims Conference and the World Jewish Congress, who had negotiated the original 1952 restitution agreement, approached Bonn on behalf of the tens of thousands of severely ill Israeli citizens lacking sufficient resources for medical treatment.

The Auswärtiges Amt’s response was negative: Having already paid some DM 15 billion to Holocaust survivors, its officials maintained that West Germany was under no legal obligation to expand its aid, and risked

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58 Knoke to AA, Tel Aviv, June 12, 13, 16, 1969, PA AA B5/34; Asher Ben Natan, Die Chuzpe zu leben: Stationen meines Lebens (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003), pp. 174–77, gives details but incorrectly cites the incidents as occurring in 1968.
60 Springer’s paper, Die Welt, June 14, 1969, also denounced the students as left wing fascists; Der Spiegel 26 (June 23, 1969), p. 5, deposed the violation of free speech. Frank to all foreign missions, Bonn, June 23, 1969, PA AA B5/34.
incurring Arab objections; and, for good measure, it raised the threat of “an eternal obligation” toward Israel.65

Goldmann, one of the Jewish world’s most prominent diplomats, lobbied his SPD and CDU friends; challenging the Auswärtiges Amt’s fear of Arab retaliation, he insisted that even Israel’s enemies distinguished between individual restitution and state support.66 After the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland added its voice, Brandt took a stand: On the eve of the elections, stressing moral over political considerations, he stated that this “old problem” needed a solution.67 In December, the new West German cabinet, after a contentious debate, authorized a DM 100 million fund to be paid to invalids over a period of three years.68 But not unexpectedly, even this positive decision—along with Bonn’s agreement to renegotiate Israel’s debt payments—necessitated prolonged negotiations that played into the hands of hardliners on both sides.69

Anticipating similar difficulties over its annual aid package, the Israeli government applied strong diplomatic pressure on Bonn because of its increasingly parlous financial situation. Due to its heavy defense expenditures, Israel’s foreign exchange reserves were nearly exhausted. At the beginning of 1969, Ben-Natan had won commitments from major figures in all three parties—from Kiesinger, Strauss, and SPD minister for economic cooperation Erhard Eppler—to maintain the previous year’s DM 140 million level;70 and Meir, during her meeting with Brandt in June at the Socialist International Congress, had urged the foreign minister to lend his support.71

69 Four days after the Jan. 26, 1970, interministerial deliberations on the entire complex of the FRG Israeli financial relations, State Secretary Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz summed up the AA’s opposition to any additional compensation to Holocaust victims, which might “continue for a decade” and damage Bonn’s efforts to improve its relations with the Arab world as well as block its intention to normalize its ties with Israel by perpetuating its “Schuld” (guilty or debtor) role in the relationship. (These remarks are especially noteworthy because of the sixty-five year old Duckwitz’s celebrated role twenty-six years earlier in the rescue of the Danish Jews in 1943.) York von Wartenburg Aufzeichnung, Jan. 27, 1970, AAPD 1970 1:92 95, n. 9.
71 Ritzel Aufzeichnung, July 24, 1969, AAPD 1969 2:846, n. 5, summarizes Brandt’s June 22 memorandum of the meeting.
Not unexpectedly, the Auswärtiges Amt again raised objections to the disproportionate amount of development loans to Israel compared with Bonn’s other clients. It also stressed the political consequences in light of the FRG’s new competition with the GDR in the Middle East. But while acknowledging the political impossibility of making any reduction during an election year, it also proposed a new restriction: to transform a small percentage of the DM 140 million loan into a project-based allocation requiring periodic progress reports.

Ben-Natan, now in his last months as ambassador to West Germany, fought back. Pleading his country’s extraordinary financial burden to Kiesinger, Brandt, and Strauss – and threatening that a negative response would provoke a strong public reaction from Meir – the Israeli ambassador convinced West German leaders to reverse a cabinet decision and reduce the amount of restricted funds.

An even more fraught issue between West Germany and Israel was their ongoing military exchanges. Although Bonn in 1965 had officially halted all arms sales to the Middle East, it is probable (although there is no documentation) that the FRG continued to supply armored vehicles and other war materials to Israel through third parties, which, when exposed in the Arab press in 1969, greatly undermined West German claims to neutrality. Moreover, the close relationship between the FRG’s defense establishment and Israel’s, developed over almost a decade of close security and military collaboration, included frequent visits as well as training Israeli officers in Bundeswehr schools; purchases of Uzi rifles, crude oil, cartridges, hand grenades, mortar parts, propellants and primers for rocket launchers, and several other forms of munitions that bolstered the Israeli arms industry and economy; and joint projects, including research on rocket engines conducted under ostensibly private auspices. Also, beginning in the mid-1950s, there was very close

76 Scheel to Schmidt, Nov. 20, 1969, AAPD 1969 2:1317 18, n. 3.
77 Deutsch Israélische Rüstungszusammenarbeit, 1967 1971, BAF BW1/185994. The West German Defense Ministry’s arms requests were filled by two Israeli firms, the state owned Israeli Military Industries and the labor union owned Soltan, and they were placed with Salgad, an Israeli front company based in Liechtenstein. Details in ibid., BV5/12188;BV5/83630 32; 84678.
collaboration between the two countries’ security services, especially involving Soviet weapons systems.\(^{78}\)

Spurred by the GDR’s diplomatic successes and by Bonn’s “precarious situation” in the Arab world, the *Auswärtiges Amt* seized the opportunity to exert greater control over the FRG’s military ties with Israel. On May 30, Walter Gehlhoff, head of the Near East Section, notified the Israeli envoy Avner Idan that the AA would henceforth scrutinize all the Bundeswehr’s purchase requests and he also announced a halt in the periodic visits by each country’s officers.\(^{79}\) Two months later, AA officials took on their Defense Ministry colleagues, urging them to end within a year all current military purchases from Israel and to place no new orders, although not ruling out the ongoing rocket research.\(^{80}\)

After the September elections, the new West German foreign minister Walter Scheel voiced his government’s position. He urged Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt to greatly reduce Bonn’s military ties with Israel,\(^{81}\) and he dismissed Ben-Natan’s protests against this “unfriendly act” toward Israel, one that undermined the long-standing and productive cooperation between their two military establishments.\(^{82}\)

### Two Elections

In their sixth national election on September 28, 1969, some 33.5 million West Germans (about 87 percent of eligible voters) cast their ballots for the 518 seats in the Federal Parliament (Bundestag). The CDU/CSU won a 46.1 percent majority; and the SPD came in second with 42.7 percent – the party’s highest number in the postwar period. And although the NPD doubled its votes in 1969, it failed to meet the 5 percent barrier for entering the Bundestag, sending waves of relief at home and abroad.\(^{83}\)

With neither Grand Coalition party gaining a majority, the FDP – although its vote had fallen stunningly from 9.5 percent in 1965 to

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\(^{82}\) Ben Natan to FM, Nov. 25, 1969, ISA 130 4183/17yn.

5.8 percent in 1969 – once more held the balance. Scheel’s refusal to join Kiesinger – foreshadowed six months earlier by the FDP’s votes for Heinemann – ended two decades of CDU/CSU rule; his small party’s alignment with Willy Brandt gave Germany its first Socialist chancellor since 1930.84

Germany’s new Left-Liberal government, which had won a less than resounding victory and held a narrow 268–250 parliamentary margin – nonetheless interpreted the results as a mandate for change: for “more democracy” – economic, social, and judicial reforms at home – and for an invigorated Ostpolitik and Nahostpolitik abroad.85 It was nonetheless an awkward alliance between reform socialists and the business-oriented FDP (some of whose members opposed the deal), and in which the latter, holding three of the fifteen cabinet seats, including the Foreign Ministry, would exert disproportionate influence.86

On the diplomatic front, Brandt’s victory drew mixed reactions from the Superpowers. Brezhnev, who had openly supported the SPD leader, viewed his triumph as a “turn toward realism” on the part of the FRG and to which Moscow was prepared to respond.87 Washington, on the other hand, was disquieted over the prospect of a “more self-assured” West Germany, “less inhibited in expressing German views and, hence, more “unbequem”[uncomfortable].88

The new Bonn government was even more disturbing for Israel. Not only had Israeli leaders grown accustomed to dealing with CDU/CSU politicians but they were also unnerved by the new government’s foreign policy orientation of rapprochement with the Soviet Union and the Arab world. Moreover, despite its long-standing ties with the Socialist International, Israel was leery of dealing with the new generation of

87 Andrey Edemskiy, “Dealing with Bonn: Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Response to West German Ostpolitik,” in Carole Fink and Bernd Schafer, eds., Ostpolitik, 1969 1974: European and Global Responses (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 17–18. This positive sentiment was not shared in East Berlin (Neues Deutschland, Nov. 9, 1969), which had long exploited Soviet West German antagonism, resented Brezhnev’s enthusiasm toward Brandt, and feared the prospect of a thaw between Moscow and Bonn.
88 Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, Oct. 29, 1969, NARA Nixon Project NSC Files/Europe Germany Box 682. A sign of independence was Brandt’s delay of his first trip as chancellor to Washington until April 1970. See also Holger Klitzing, “The Nixon Administration and Ostpolitik,” in Fink and Schafer, Ostpolitik, 1969 1974, pp. 80–93.
European socialist politicians who sought a more balanced position in Middle East affairs.89

Brandt quickly confirmed the Israelis’ anxiety. In his government declaration on October 28 – with its ambitious domestic program, conciliatory proposals toward the East, and assertion of a more “active partnership” with the United States – the new West German chancellor conspicuously omitted his predecessors’ customary reference to Bonn’s special relationship to the Jewish people and Israel.90

On that day, 1.4 million Israelis (more than 80 percent of eligible voters) cast their ballots for the 120 seats in the parliament (Knesset). Led by Golda Meir, the Labor Alignment received 46 percent of the vote, and Gahal, the main opposition party led by Menachem Begin, received 22 percent. The remaining one-third of the vote was split among the National Religious Party (10 percent) and the ten small parties (20 percent) that won between 1 percent and 4 percent and would thus send representatives to the Knesset. Because of the Alignment’s failure to reform Israel’s electoral system and also the electorate’s resistance to Meir’s appeal for a “clear majority,” the prime minister was compelled to form another “wall to wall” coalition with Gahal and the National Religious Party.91

Although there was no change of government in Israel in 1969, the results were also momentous. Despite the hawkish views of her fractious coalition, Meir remained officially committed to trading land for peace. However, her government was even more intent on “creating facts,” which included an expansion of existing Israeli settlements on the West Bank and in Gaza, the Golan, and the Sinai, making the prospects of an agreement with the Arabs all the more remote.92 The accidental septuagenarian prime minister, who had averted a destructive battle between Dayan and Allon, also held views that satisfied her most militant...

89 Israel was especially concerned about two prominent SPD figures: Hans Jürgen Wischnewski (nicknamed “Ben Wisch”), the party’s national secretary who had developed extremely close ties with Arab leaders since the Algerian War; and Gerhard Jahn, the AA parliamentary state secretary who, in a major Sept. 19 speech, had laid out a new Nahostpolitik that included strengthening Bonn’s ties with the Arabs. Ben Natan to Avner, Aug. 12, 1969, ISA 130 4184/8; Ben Natan to Avner, Bonn, Oct. 20, 1969, ibid., 4183/17zn.


compatriots. In her hard-hitting government declaration, Meir blamed the USSR for the state of war in the Middle East, rejected Great Power mediation, and criticized the oil-dependent European governments for wooing the Arabs.93

**Aftermath**

Almost immediately after their new governments were formed, West Germany and Israel launched major foreign initiatives: Willy Brandt dispatched his chief foreign policy advisor Egon Bahr to Moscow to begin talks on West German-Soviet détente, and he spent his Christmas holiday in Tunisia attempting to expand Bonn’s relations with the Arab world.94 Golda Meir, heeding the advice of her military advisors and ignoring warnings of Soviet intervention, decided to escalate the current war against Egypt with a deep-penetration bombing campaign;95 also, abandoning long-standing Israeli discretion, Meir openly demanded the emigration of Soviet Jewry to raise Israel’s Jewish population and aid in the settlement of the conquered territories.96

Behind the scenes, West German and Israeli officials attempted to heal the public rift between their two countries, exacerbated by the FRG’s resistance to Israeli appeals and Israel’s critical reception of Brandt’s appointment.97 In his final days in West Germany, Ben-Natan sought to ascertain Bonn’s future direction and to explain the Israeli side. Although Brandt’s intentions toward Israel were unclear, several disturbing elements had become evident.

Above all, the new West German government would insist on a normal relationship. Summoned to the chancellor’s office on November 24, Ben-Natan met Egon Bahr, who announced brusquely that unlike former regimes the FRG’s new leaders had no links to the Third Reich and

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93 Knoke to AA, Tel Aviv, Dec. 1969, PA AA B36/455.
95 Brandt, who was accompanied by Wischnewski, had a long time connection with Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba through the Socialist International. During this visit, the FRG chancellor on Jan. 8, 1970, also met secretly with Algerian foreign minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika, ibid., A9/30.
98 Meroz to embassy Bonn, Nov. 14, 1969, ISA 130 4183/17/yn.
were not burdened by a sense of collective guilt toward Israel. More specifically, Bahr explained that Israel, which had hitherto enjoyed “exaggerated” levels of economic assistance, would now have to make do with less and to accept more restrictive conditions. Ben-Natan’s retort – his defense of their previous financial and military arrangements, his reminder that Israel, unlike Bonn’s other debtors, had faithfully fulfilled its annual DM 80 million repayments, and his appeal to the new chancellor to redeem his pledge to disabled Holocaust victims – received a noncommittal reception.98

Second, Israel’s previous allies would adhere to Bonn’s new direction. Helmut Schmidt, the new defense minister, acknowledged the significance of Bahr’s admonition, and Walter Scheel, the new foreign minister, offered only bland reassurances.99 Although Herbert Wehner, the new chair of the SPD parliamentary faction, sought to soften the blow, Wischnewski underlined Brandt’s ambitious pro-Arab initiatives.100

Finally, Ben-Natan paid a farewell visit to Brandt who, like his three predecessors, clearly intended to dominate West German foreign policy. Although he disclaimed authorship of a recent article in the SPD bulletin advocating a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and a “just solution” of the Palestinian refugee problem, and he denied any antagonism toward Israel,101 Brandt stressed Bonn’s neutrality and insisted that a “true peace” could be accomplished only by unconditional talks between the two sides.102

Golda Meir, who also intended to control her country’s foreign policy and held strong anti-Soviet and anti-German views, considered Brandt’s evenhandedness a major challenge. Next to Washington, Bonn was still an important element in Israel’s quest to make its voice heard abroad, especially to balance France’s hostility and Britain’s equivocations in European forums.103

She therefore took an audacious step: announcing the dispatch of her dovish foreign minister Abba Eban to Bonn – the first Israeli cabinet minister to make an official visit to the FRG. Long requested by the

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98 There was considerable Israeli interest in Bahr’s background: his Jewish grandmother, his father’s refusal to divorce his Jewish wife (which had cost him his teaching position), and Bahr’s dismissal from the Wehrmacht in 1944 after two years’ service as a Mischlinge. Idan to Avner, Nov. 24, 1969, ISA 130 4183/17sn.

99 Ben Natan to Avner, Nov. 25, Dec. 12, 1969, Ibid.

100 Ben Natan to Avner, Bonn, Nov. 25, Dec. 2, 13, 1969, Ibid.

101 Brandt joked that the strong “Israel lobby” in his party and the trade unions would prevent him from taking a pro Arab stance.

102 Ben Natan to FM, Nov. 25 (2 tels.), Dec. 3, 24, 1969, ISA 130 4183/17sn.

103 Details in Carole Fink, “Ostpolitik and West German Israeli Relations,” in Fink and Schaefer Ostpolitik 1969 1974, pp. 188 89.
Israelis, long delayed by the West Germans, this move was fiercely opposed by both right- and left-wing members of Meir’s new cabinet.104 And although no substantial matters were at stake, the visit’s symbolic importance was underscored when Brandt proceeded to invite Jordanian prime minister Bahjat Talhouni to visit first before Eban’s arrival in order to balance his concession to Israel.105 In a portent of the future, Brandt and Meir had begun to spar over achieving a balance between the past, the present, and the future.


105 Redies to Knoke, Bonn, Jan. 7, 1970, Ibid.
We propose to pursue [Ostpolitik] with due regard to the lessons of history and without illusions ... to act with neither recklessness nor unwarranted timidity.¹

The tragic memories of the recent Jewish past weigh down upon me with overpowering gravity ... reinforcing the conviction that improved relations between the Federal Republic and Israel are one of the urgent moral necessities of our age.²

Today the majority of the German population tends not to see our relationship with Israel primarily in the context of the past.³

At 12:30 p.m. on February 22, 1970 – a cold, gray, and blustery day – Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban arrived at Munich’s Riem airport on a British European Airways flight from London. As the first Israeli government official to pay a formal visit to the Federal Republic,⁴ Eban had decided to begin his historic journey with a visit to Dachau, the Third Reich’s first concentration camp where more than twenty-eight thousand prisoners had perished, among them a high proportion of Jews. By arriving first in the city associated with the birth of Nazism and also with the West’s infamous appeasement of Adolf Hitler in 1938, Eban’s purpose was clear: to underline the continued presence of the past in West German–Israeli relations.⁵

However, the present had also become ominous. Less than two weeks before Eban’s arrival, the Middle East conflict had burst upon the Bavarian capital

⁴ Three years earlier on Apr. 25, 1967, Eban had accompanied former prime minister David Ben Gurion to the funeral of Konrad Adenauer.
when three grenade-wielding Palestinian guerillas had attempted to hijack an El Al plane on the Riem airfield, resulting in one death and eleven gravely wounded.\(^6\) And on February 13, an unidentified arsonist had set fire to the Jewish communal home in Munich, killing seven elderly Holocaust survivors and leaving ten wounded.\(^7\)

Perceiving a link between these events and the Eban visit – which was reinforced by intelligence reports of anti-Israel demonstrations planned by Palestinians and left-wing Germans and of death threats against the Israeli foreign minister – Federal and Bavarian officials put extraordinary security measures in place on February 22, including some fifteen hundred armed police and border guards.\(^8\) To foil potential assassins, there was a convoy of armored vehicles at the Riem Airport; but Eban was instead shuttled by helicopter first to the official luncheon in the center of Munich and then to the former concentration camp some seventeen miles northwest of the Bavarian capital.\(^9\)

At Dachau, a solemn Eban, clad in a dark coat and a tall brown fur hat and accompanied by the new Israeli ambassador, the West German ambassador to Israel, Bavarian officials, and representatives of Munich’s Jewish community, placed a large wreath of white carnations and blue irises at Dachau’s striking international memorial. Then, guided by Alois Hundhammer, the former Bavarian agriculture minister and a former Dachau prisoner, Eban toured the

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\(^7\) Details in “Brand im Gebäude der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde in München am 13. 2. 1970,” BayHStA MInn/90105; also Kraushaar, Wann endlich beginnt, pp. 86–149. The local police offered a DM 100,000 reward for information (the highest in the history of the FRG), “Brand ohne heisse Spur,” Die Zeit, Feb. 20, 1970, and on Feb. 16, 1970, the Brandt government voted to spend DM 1 million to rebuild the damaged structure. http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0000/k/k1970k/kap12/kap29/index.html. The case to this day remains unsolved.


Earlier, Israel’s inquiries over Bonn’s security measures had raised hackles in the Auswärtiges Amt, Redies Aufzeichnung, Bonn, Feb. 4, 1970, PA AA B36/461.

camp’s museum, viewing its photographs, documents, and artifacts. Last, Eban visited the Jewish memorial – a somber, bunker-like structure built of rough-hewn basalt blocks and topped by a seven-branched candelabrum, where he placed another wreath and inaudibly recited the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead.10

After a ceremonial reception at the minister president’s residence – during which Eban expressed appreciation for his hosts’ warmth and generosity but also reminded them of the shadows of the past – at 10:20 p.m. the Israeli foreign minister departed for Bonn, leaving Bavarian officials (who up until the last minute had continued to receive death threats against Eban) greatly relieved at the uneventful end of his 7.5-hour “Blitzbesuch.”11


In 1970, while the United States and the Soviet Union continued to pursue détente, two major issues – Vietnam and the Middle East – continued to divide them. After Moscow had failed to extract concessions from Hanoi, the Nixon administration escalated the bombing of North Vietnam and also expanded the war into Cambodia in the hope of winning more favorable peace terms and expediting the US troop withdrawal, but at the same time triggering national and worldwide protests. The Soviet rejection of the Rogers Plan to bring peace to Israel and Egypt and its dispatch of soldiers, pilots, and SAM missiles to Egypt to fend off Israeli air attacks would convince Washington to act alone: to reach out to both parties and forge the August 7–8, 1970, cease-fire ending the War of Attrition.

With the Superpowers in deadlock, Willy Brandt’s new West German government had considerable room for maneuver in 1970. And indeed the chancellor’s goals for his Ostpolitik were ambitious: the launch of an almost seamless series of steps involving both Bonn’s NATO allies and the Soviet bloc, combining diplomatic initiatives with economic, military, and cultural proposals, and aimed at advancing Bonn’s goal of eventual German unification by removing the Cold War straitjacket from Europe and the rest of the world.

But the world was also changing. By 1970, the United Nations, with 127 members – more than twice its original number – was seeking a larger voice in international affairs. Although the Superpowers still controlled the Security Council and were thus able to curb the secretary-general’s intervention in regions of their special interests, the Third World–dominated General Assembly had become a vocal forum for the appeals of less-developed countries for expanded North-South cooperation, investments, and technological transfers; and it was also about to become the site of the politically charged discussions of the 1970s over...
international terrorism, environmental politics, and human rights – all of which would challenge the Cold War’s polarities.

**Bonn’s New Direction**

Willy Brandt was determined to act quickly. The FRG, now led by an awkward coalition of Social Democrats (SDP) and Center-Right Free Democrats (FDP) with only a narrow parliamentary majority, was also wracked by its first serious economic downturn since 1949 and by threats of violence from the new Red Army Faction. Indeed, Ostpolitik had a significant domestic dimension: By renouncing the country’s two-decades-long Cold War orientation – the insistence on the priority of German unification according to Bonn’s terms (including restoring Germany’s 1937 borders) – and by declaring its goal of a peaceful unified Europe (Wandel durch Annäherung [change through rapprochement]), the Brandt-Scheel government was not only signaling a renunciation of the Nazi past but also offering the prospect of economic, political, cultural, and human ties with their compatriots in East Germany and a more secure future for West Berlin. And despite the CDU and CSU denunciations of Brandt’s betrayal of the Federal Republic’s ethos and its constitution, his bold direction appealed to a growing number of (especially younger) West Germans.

The onset of Ostpolitik in 1970 consisted of a series of interlinked personal démarches, brilliantly masterminded by Brandt and Bahr, who

trod a careful line between accommodation and German national interests.22 The new chancellor, a charismatic politician as well as a realist, intended to overcome the East’s suspicions and bad memories by conducting an active campaign to conciliate the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies, including the GDR. Thus Bahr headed to Moscow in January 1970 and, following months of difficult negotiations, on August 12 Brandt and Brezhnev signed a treaty not only renouncing the use of force and recognizing the existing borders (including the frontier between the two Germanys), but also acknowledging the possibility of a future unification.23 Thus Brandt initiated the first meetings between East and West German leaders since 1949 in Erfurt on March 19 and in Kassel on May 21.24 And thus Brandt plied the route to Warsaw, where on December 7 he signed a second major treaty specifically acknowledging Poland’s postwar frontiers and renouncing Bonn’s claims east of the Oder-Neisse line: an episode that gained historic status when the West German leader, after placing a wreath at the Warsaw Ghetto monument, suddenly fell to his knees in a gesture of contrition.25

At the same time, Brandt conducted whirlwind talks with his principal Western allies to assure them of Bonn’s fidelity and ease their alarm over another Rapallo: the April 1922 treaty between Germany and Soviet Russia that had rent the allied front at the Genoa Conference and led to clandestine military ties between Berlin and Moscow. On his visit to Paris at the end of January 1970, the new chancellor quelled President Georges Pompidou’s fears that his Ostpolitik, which threatened to supplant France’s earlier overtures to Moscow, would weaken the cohesion of Western Europe.26 In March he won British prime minister Harold


Wilson’s support in return for Bonn’s promise to endorse London’s application to the EEC.27 And during his April visit to Washington, although unable to overcome Nixon’s suspicions of his left-wing politics, Brandt utilized the strength of their bilateral bond to convince National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (who had established a back channel with Egon Bahr) not to openly oppose his overtures to Moscow.28

A key corollary of Brandt’s Ostpolitik was his Nahostpolitik: setting a new course in the Middle East, a Wandel durch Ausgewogenheit [change through balance]. Beginning with his October 28, 1969, speech to the Bundestag, the newly elected chancellor had announced a more even-handed direction: working for peace in accordance with the Security Council’s Resolution 242, maintaining “good relations with all countries in the region,” and continuing to refrain from the sale of weapons to “areas of tension” – proposals that elicited applause from the CDU/CSU opposition as well as from the governing parties.29 Still reeling from East Germany’s entry into the Middle East a year earlier, the Federal Republic under Brandt’s leadership intended to increase its efforts to restore relations with nine Arab governments in order to ensure the flow of its oil supply and to strengthen the economy that would drive its Ostpolitik. Through offers of trade and development aid, it would strive to alleviate Arab suspicions of its one-sided support for Israel. And as a key EEC and NATO member – anxious over Soviet incursions in the region, vulnerable to the fallout from the Middle East conflict, but also excluded from the UN and Great Power deliberations – Bonn aspired to play a “stabilizing” role in the region.30

With Brandt focused on Ostpolitik, he relied on two figures with experience in Bonn’s development programs to take the lead in the Middle East: his FDP


partner and foreign minister Walter Scheel who, although a novice in diplomacy, was a former minister of economic cooperation and development and a strong proponent of a more evenhanded Middle East policy; and the SPD’s national director, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, who for some fifteen years had developed close ties with the Arab world. Brandt sought to overcome French suspicions and gain the support of both Paris and London for his Nahostpolitik. He also appealed to two friendly Arab countries to intervene on Bonn’s behalf with both hard-line and moderate Arab regimes: Tunisia, with which the Federal Republic already had substantial economic ties, and Jordan, a key liaison with Cairo and the Arab League whose prime minister had been invited to Bonn before Abba Eban’s visit. But Brandt also told his Western and Arab interlocutors that there were two unassailable limits to Bonn’s courtship of the Arab world: The Federal Republic would neither engage in a bidding contest with East Berlin, nor would it sacrifice its relations with Israel.


33 Seydoux to MAE, Bonn, Jan. 26, 1970, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z1586; also Brandt Pompidou, Brandt Wilson meetings, nn. 26, 27. Both countries still had a major presence in the Middle East and could thus aid Bonn’s démarches.

34 Brandt’s talks with Tunisian prime minister Bahi Ladgham, Aufzeichnung, Jan. 8, 1970, AdsD WBA A 9/24, and foreign minister Habib Bourguiba, Aufzeichnung, Mar. 12, ibid., A9/30, during which the chancellor discussed a DM 40 50 million capital assistance program as well as increased EEC aid for Tunisia.


37 In response to the alarm of a pro Israeli SPD Bundestag deputy, Brandt wrote in Feb.: “We anticipate no change in our relations with Israel, despite our efforts to improve relations with the Arabs. . . One cannot measure relations between Germany and Israel
On the eve of Abba Eban’s visit, Brandt had set the new tone for his *Nahostpolitik*. On February 10, he chaired a two-and-a-half-hour meeting of key cabinet members and invited representatives of the AA and the Bundestag along with labor and banking officials to review the FRG’s ties to Israel.\(^{38}\) In opening the discussion, the chancellor stated that Bonn’s “balanced” Middle East policy would in no way imply an “indifference” to Israel’s fate and that the much touted normalization in no way implied a “devaluation” of bilateral ties with Jerusalem but “rather a goal to be achieved.” On the other hand, Brandt also insisted, “We must adopt a policy toward Israel without complexes” [ohne Komplexe] or “extortions” [Erpressungen].\(^{39}\) Acknowledging the Arabs’ indignation over Eban’s visit and their anticipated scrutiny of Bonn’s responses to Israeli demands, the chancellor called for caution, coordination, and candor in the forthcoming negotiations.\(^{40}\)

The second part of Brandt’s announcement fell upon a highly receptive audience: Wischnewski stressed Bonn’s “sensitive” position vis-à-vis the Arabs; Ernst Achenbach, the FDP deputy and the coalition’s influential *Auswärtige Ausschuss* rapporteur, urged the government to guard against additional international burdens; Erhard Eppler, the SPD minister for economic cooperation, cautioned against unconditional development loans to Israel; and Scheel announced his dislike of “blackmail . . . even from friends.”

Only one participant demurred. Walter Hesselbach, chairman of the board of the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft and also chairman of the German–Israeli Business Association, pointed out the ambiguity of Brandt’s formula – of normalizing Bonn’s relations with the Arab world without sacrificing Israel. In view of that country’s “dire circumstances,” Hesselbach urged a “steadfast” policy toward Jerusalem.\(^{41}\) But in a follow-up memorandum, AA ministerial director Paul Frank (who was about to become Scheel’s state secretary) downplayed the FRG’s widely known efforts to court Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, but

with the same yardstick applied to those with other countries, particularly in the economic sphere,” AdsD WBA A8/34; but he added, “We will also not pursue an anti Arab policy.”


\(^{39}\) Earlier, in an interview with the Beirut based newspaper *Al Hayat* Brandt had allegedly criticized Israel’s occupation of Arab lands and said he had no intention of approaching Israel as a “penitent.” Seydoux to MAE, Jan. 26, 1970, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z1586.


\(^{41}\) Ibid.
urged that the Israeli foreign minister be placed on notice of the new limits of the Bonn-Jerusalem relationship.  

Undoubtedly, the Brandt government was preparing to adopt a new course toward Israel. Although West German–Israeli relations over the previous two decades had been anything but smooth, Bonn’s ambitious new direction – its new ties with the hostile Soviet Union, its conciliation of France, its determination to expand the European Economic Community (from which Israel had been excluded), and, above all, its wooing of Israel’s Arab enemies – would inevitably raise major questions of continuity and confidence among Israeli policy makers and journalists and alarm in the larger Jewish world.

There was still another level of distancing occurring between Bonn and Jerusalem. As foreshadowed in Brandt’s first speech as chancellor, his was the first FRG government that denied any connection with the Nazi past. Its officials insisted that twenty-five years after the end of World War II, almost half the FRG’s youthful population felt neither guilt nor responsibility toward the Holocaust, were indifferent in their sentiments toward Israel, and were more preoccupied with the oppression of Third World peoples by imperialist and colonial powers than with their country’s links to the history of the Third Reich. West German diplomats emphasized that Israel’s hard-line stance toward its Arab opponents clashed with the FRG’s overwhelming desire for peace on Europe’s vulnerable southern flank and risked a Superpower confrontation.

However, Brandt’s government was linked with the Third Reich. Twelve of its members – among them Foreign Minister Walter Scheel (FDP), Economics Minister Karl Schiller (SPD), Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (FDP), and Minister for Economic Cooperation Erhard Eppler (SPD), as well as the chancellor’s chief of staff Horst Ehmke (SPD) – had all joined the Nazi Party. Most of them, including Eppler, Ehmke, and

45 Malte Herwig, Die Flakhelfer: Wie aus Hitlers jüngsten Parteimitgliedern Deutschlands führende Demokraten wurden (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 2013). Beginning in 1967, the West German government had privately refused US offers to hand over to Bonn the special archive housed in the Berlin Document Center in the US Sector in Berlin containing some seventy four records of key FRG politicians and other public figures, which had been removed and housed in the director’s safe. In 1994, after German unification (and after all the NSDAP records had been filmed and deposited in the US National Archives in Washington), they were returned to a united Germany, housed in the Bundesarchiv, and made fully available to researchers, ibid., pp. 175-203. On Die Linke’s demand in 2013 for an accounting by the AA: “Nazi Vergangenheit von Politikern: Ein doppeltes Spiel,” Berliner Zeitung, June 21, 2013.
Genscher, born between 1925 and 1927, educated under the Third Reich, and enrolled in Hitler-Jugend, had applied to the NSDAP in the wave of the mass recruitments between 1942 and 1944, and their memberships had been suspended during the course of their military service.

The Nazi past of most of these officials had remained in obscurity. After 1945 the four occupying powers, out of practical as well as moral considerations, had exempted this cohort from denazification and exclusion from public office; and afterward US authorities had hidden their party records in order to protect their careers in the Federal Republic. Nonetheless, these individuals (although some of their contemporaries had demurred) had not only applied for privileged status in a victorious Third Reich but also for a quarter of a century had remained silent.

Moreover, two of Brandt’s senior cabinet members had joined the NSDAP as adults. Scheel (b. 1919), a decorated air force officer, had applied in 1941, although he persistently denied his membership. And the popular and politically powerful Schiller (b. 1911), who had joined the SA in 1933 and the NSDAP in 1937 and placed his expertise in

The seven other youthful NSDAP members were Josef Ertl (FDP), Minister of Food, Agriculture, and Forestry, and six parliamentary state secretaries: Karl Moersch (FDP, Foreign Ministry), Alfons Bayerl (SPD, Ministry of Justice), Wolfram Dorn (FDP, Ministry of the Interior), Joachim Raffert (SPD, Ministry of Education and Science), Karl Herold (SPD, Ministry for Inter German Relations), and Brigitte Freyh (SPD, Ministry of Economic Cooperation). I thank Glenn Cuomo, who has done prodigious research on this issue, for this information; see his unpublished paper, “Opening the Director’s Safe: An Examination of the Berlin Document Center’s Restricted Collection of NSDAP Records.”


Scheel never acknowledged his NSDAP membership. In 1970, he learned (from his FDP rival Erich Mende) that his party file had been sequestered in the Berlin Document Center (Herwig, Die Flakhelfer, pp. 171 72); but in 1978, four years after he was elected FRG president and in response to press leaks, he claimed uncertainty about whether he had actually applied. “Scheel fehlen Unterlagen über seine NSDAP Mitgliedschaft,” Der Tagesspiegel, Nov. 12, 1978, p. 2; Kurt Becker, “Die Schatten der Vergangenheit,” Die Zeit, Nov. 17, 1978. And in a 2010 interview, he insisted (inaccurately) that serving soldiers had been forbidden to join the party. “Scheel: Verständnis für Herr Kohler,” Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung, June 14, 2010.

The delay in Schiller’s enrollment was likely the result of the Nazis’ four year block [Mitgliedersperre] on new members, due to the huge influx of hundreds of thousands
labor procurement and economic intelligence in the service of the Third Reich, had acknowledged his party membership, but steadfastly refused to issue an explanation of his “Brown” past.

Consequently, the 1969 Machtwechsel marked an unspoken change in West German–Israeli relations. In their day-to-day transactions with Brandt’s government, the Israelis no longer dealt with the generation that had acknowledged their Nazi pasts and sought a measure of atonement; instead, they were dealing with individuals who had risen to high positions in the Federal Republic without either divulging them or apologizing. They also faced a chancellor with an impeccable anti-Nazi record who was a realistic politician (and who in 1965, despite protests from party comrades, had welcomed the brilliant Schiller into the SPD’s leadership team), and was preoccupied more with forging a German future than with dwelling on the Nazi past. Indeed, the principal architect of the FRG’s new foreign policy was firmly opposed to the permanent stigmatization of former servants of the Third Reich; and, like Scheel,


After the war, Schiller, who resumed his academic career at the universities of Kiel and Hamburg, joined the SPD in 1946, served in the Hamburg and West Berlin administrations, entered the Bundestag in 1965, and became minister for economic affairs in the Grand Coalition government between 1966 and 1969. Torben Lütjen, Karl Schiller (1911 1994): “Superminister” Willy Brandts (Bonn: Dietz, 2007); also Lütjen, “Karl Schiller: Der erste Superminister,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Apr. 4, 2011.


Nonetheless, during the heated election campaign in 1969, Schiller’s harsh criticisms of Kiesinger threatened to expose his own service to the Nazi regime. Among those most concerned were Günter Grass (“Neue Enthüllungen: Grass forderte Wirtschaftsminister Schiller zur NS Beichte auf,” Der Spiegel [Sept. 29, 2006], http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/neue-enthueellungen-grass-forderte-wirtschaftsminister-schiller-zur-ns-beichte-auf-a-439977.html), the US embassy in Bonn, and Germany’s left liberal press: Lütjen, Karl Schiller (1911 1994), pp. 269 71.


Brandt at the Apr. 16, 1970, cabinet meeting dealing with Scheel’s controversial nomination of Ernst Achenbach as an EEC commissioner, tacitly defended the FDP deputy, who had been accused of complicity in the 1943 roundup and deportation of two thousand French Jews and organizing the plunder of Jewish property, https://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0000/k/k1970k/kap12/kap218/para314.html?highlight=true&search=achenbach&stemming=true&field=all#highlightedTerm; “Ramponiert,” Die Zeit 16 (Apr. 17, 1970); “Achenbach: Unrecht geschehen,” Der Spiegel 17 (Apr. 20, 1970). However, due to protests by its European partners, Bonn
Brandt rejected the idea of collective German guilt and of the Germans’ eternal obligation to Israel and to the Jewish people. Hesselbach’s warning to the February 10 ministerial gathering was therefore prescient: There would now be considerable friction over the discrepancy between Bonn’s propitiatory language and its new policies toward Israel.

Israel Responds

On February 2, 1970, Eliashiv Ben-Horin, Israel’s new ambassador to West Germany, had arrived in Bonn. Born in 1921 in Upper Silesia and subsequently immigrating to Palestine with his family in 1935, Ben-Horin had studied law in Jerusalem and London and served in both the British and Israeli armies before entering the foreign ministry in 1950 where, after posts at the UN and in Washington,53 he had been a director of African and Asian affairs within the ministry as well as ambassador in several African and South American countries.54 Thus in striking contrast with his predecessor Asher Ben-Natan – whose professional career had been largely focused on German affairs and who for three years had interacted with friendly CDU/CSU-led governments (if a not always welcoming West German youth) – Ben-Horin, although a seasoned diplomat, was a novice in the Central European issues now developing under Bonn’s disquieting new leadership and foreign policy direction.55

Indeed, Israel was in a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the Federal Republic. It had become isolated diplomatically after its December 11, 1969 declaration, insisting on direct negotiations with the Arabs, had blocked the prospects of a UN- or a Great Power–mediated peace settlement, and it had also rejected calls to halt its air war against Egypt.56 Moreover, the Israeli economy was heavily weighed down by its huge military expenditures, which the Nixon administration was currently refusing to underwrite.57
Ben-Horin nonetheless received a mostly congenial welcome in Bonn, including a private interview with Willy Brandt. The only jarring note was sounded by Horst Ehmke, Brandt’s acerbic cabinet chief and close confidant, who echoed the chancellor’s concern over Israeli press leaks and over Israel’s tendency not only to accept German money but also to “show off to the Arabs” about Bonn’s concessions.

Added to its somber beginning in Munich, Eban’s arrival in Bonn on the night of February 22 had been preceded by other inauspicious developments. Both publics had been agitated over the visit: the Israelis over allegations that no formal invitation had been issued to their foreign minister and the Germans over Eban’s press statement that as a Jew and an Israeli he was able to visit the Federal Republic only in an official capacity.

Eban’s five-country mission to Western Europe had also been shaped by the ongoing violence in the Middle East. Eban’s hopes to enlist support from friendly governments against US and Soviet pressures on Israel had received a significant setback on February 11, when the Israeli cabinet had overwhelmingly rejected his proposal for a unilateral ceasefire with Egypt. Also, despite the international outcry over the accidental bombing of an Egyptian industrial plant on February 12 (in which seventy civilians died), Israel had resumed the aerial attacks four days later. Even the extreme security measures in each of Eban’s European stops underlined his country’s growing isolation.


58 Ben Horin to FM, Feb. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 27, 1970, ISA 130 4572/38; Seydoux to MAE, Mar. 11, 1970, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z1586.
61 Eban visited Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Great Britain, but had not been invited to France.
Not unexpectedly, Eban’s two-day visit to the West German capital was a difficult one.\(^\text{65}\) There were anti-Israel demonstrations by German and Arab students, an anti-Israel teach-in at the university, a pro-Arab march through the streets of Bonn, and skirmishes with police during a nighttime protest outside the office of the *Bonner General-Anzeiger*. In the meantime, the heavily guarded Eban conducted a full schedule of interviews with Scheel, Genscher, Schiller, and Finance Minister Alex Möller, and also with Heinemann and Brandt in their private residences. He delivered a formal address in the Bundestag building to the German–Israeli Association and held a press conference on February 24.\(^\text{66}\)

The discussions were polite and general but also brittle. When Heinemann evoked a brighter future for their two peoples, Eban stressed the continuing weight of the past.\(^\text{67}\) When Scheel suggested it was time to “normalize” relations, Eban retorted that relations between Germany and Israel would never be normalized.\(^\text{68}\) When German officials expressed hopes for a Middle East peace based on Resolution 242, Eban denounced Soviet machinations, France’s arms embargo, and the GDR’s hostility for intensifying the Arabs’ intransigence and implored his hosts to support direct negotiations.\(^\text{69}\) And after Scheel repeated Brandt’s assurance that the new *Nahostpolitik* would in no way impair the FRG’s relations with Israel, Eban insisted that this tie be placed securely in a “watertight, separate, and independent compartment.”\(^\text{70}\)

However, on one issue – the new threat of terrorism – the two countries appeared to stand together. Echoing Eban’s charges of the Arab governments’ political and financial support of the Palestinian guerrillas and their responsibility for their atrocities, Scheel told a press conference

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\(^\text{65}\) Seydoux to MAE, Feb. 25, 1970, FMAE Europe/RFA 1961 70 Z1586. After his arrival at the Cologne Bonn Airport in a heavy rainstorm, Eban was whisked into an armored car and sped to his hotel, which was teaming with security agents. Kraushaar, *Wann endlich beginnt*, p. 201.

\(^\text{66}\) Itinerary, Feb. 23–25, 1970, AA B36/461. Eban also met with officials in the *Auswärtiges Amt*, with Bundestag members, and with representatives of the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*.

\(^\text{67}\) Causing Heinemann to remark that “more than fifty percent [sic] of the present population had no experience of the Nazi past and no knowledge of history.” Aufzeichnung, Feb. 23, 1970, BAK B122/12308.


on February 23 that he had dispatched messages “through diplomatic channels” to several Arab capitals protesting the Palestinian attacks on civilian aircraft.\textsuperscript{71} Also, the Bonn government moved quickly to increase security at its airports.\textsuperscript{72}

Both sides publicly expressed satisfaction with Eban’s visit. Despite the awkward and costly security measures, Eban believed he had opened a “new page” in West German-Israeli relations: In return for his assurances of Israel’s non-interference in the FRG’s \textit{Nahostpolitik}, he claimed to have bolstered Bonn’s resistance to Arab pressure to loosen its ties with Israel and secured a commitment for a return visit from Scheel.\textsuperscript{73} The Brandt government was relieved over the absence of compromising statements or incidents as well as by the mild reactions from Arab capitals.\textsuperscript{74}

Nonetheless, a large gap had opened between the two countries. Throughout his visit, Eban had insisted on the maintenance of the status quo between Bonn and Jerusalem; but the \textit{Auswärtiges Amt} was now determined to introduce “step-by-step” changes.\textsuperscript{75} To make matters clearer, on March 17 Helmut Redies, the recently named head of the AA’s Near East and North Africa Section and a strong advocate of expanding Bonn’s relations with the Arab world, called upon the chancellor to halt the various ministries’ competing transactions with Israel and to centralize policy making in his office.\textsuperscript{76}

The change in Bonn’s orientation was also reflected in the mainstream media.\textsuperscript{77} Although the German translation of Abba Eban’s newly published history of the Jewish people received a respectful reception, critics


\textsuperscript{76} Redies Aufzeichnung, Mar. 17, 1970, PA AA B30/513. The AA was also intent on playing a far larger role in West Germany’s development policies toward the Third World, replacing the rival Economics and Finance ministries. Herbst Aufzeichnung, Jan. 26, 1970, AAPD 1970 1:89 92.
remarked on the dovish foreign minister’s acceptance of his country’s use of force against its neighbors.  

And in contrast with the Springer press’s strong pro-Israel tone, the other daily West German newspapers and weekly magazines had begun presenting a darker picture: depicting the plight of the Palestinians and the militarization of Israeli society, the danger of escalation in the Middle East, and the Meir government’s resistance to leftist calls for peace.

Israel had only limited means to alter its public image. Ben-Horin, although acknowledging the need for more vigorous forms of hasbara, also recognized the impediments: the hostility of West Germany’s New Left (fed increasingly by “Arab propagandists”) as well as the diminished support of Israel’s traditional allies – the churches, trade unions, and Social Democrats – whose new generation was less likely than its forebears to automatically take Israel’s side in the seemingly unending Middle East conflict. The new ambassador reached out to the CDU/CSU opposition, and, especially, to its new generation of young politicians, stressing Israel’s central role in curbing Soviet advances in the Middle East.

But Israel also recognized the necessity of restraint. Although right-wing Israeli journalists openly supported the CDU/CSU, the mainstream press had adopted a cautiously optimistic stance toward the Brandt government. In a particularly chilling incident, on May 13 the Federal Republic endorsed the Security Council’s unanimous condemnation of Israel’s incursions into Lebanon (in response to a Palestinian guerrilla

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*Der Spiegel* on Feb. 16 devoted a major section to the Palestinians, on Mar. 9 and Apr. 20 discussed the dramatic expansion of Israeli armaments, on May 4 and 25 covered its air war over Egypt, and on June 22 remarked that Israel’s war against the Arabs cost the government DM 12 million per day; also Dietrich Strothmann, “Israel’s ‘kalte Kolonisation,’” *Die Zeit*, Apr. 17, 1970, described the expansion of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; Amnon Rubinstein, “Zu welchen Opfern ist Israel bereit?” *Die Zeit*, Aug. 14, 1970, detailed the growing support for Goldmann’s initiatives.

80 Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 31, 1970, ISA 130 4573/3; Julius Klein to Eban, Chicago, Apr. 7, 1970, ISA 130 4572/38. Details on the six member delegation to Israel, May 9-16, 1970, of the CDU’s Junger Union led by Jürgen Wohlrabe (who was on his eleventh mission since 1965), ACDF Nachlass Wohlrabe 061/1.

attack on a school bus, resulting in eleven dead and twenty-one wounded). But Ben-Horin’s response – a strongly worded (and unauthorized) démarche protesting the FRG’s silence over the terrorist act, which the Israeli Right applauded – disconcerted his superiors as much as it irritated West German officials.82

The rogue campaign by the German-Jewish journalist Alfred Wolfmann also backfired.83 Wolfmann’s blunt critiques of Brandt and Scheel and of their Ost- and Nahostpolitik in the West German, Israeli, and American press undermined Ben-Horin’s hasbara efforts and embarrassed Jerusalem, especially when they were quoted by anti-German Israeli nationalists.84 Brandt and his entourage bristled at Wolfmann’s criticisms; AA officials resented his use of leaked information; and Israel’s closest friends in the Federal Republic warned of the consequences of widening the rift between the two governments.85

At the Negotiating Table

On June 29, 1970, Israel achieved a modest victory: a five-year preferential tariff agreement with the European Economic Community. Signed in Luxemburg between Eban and the six Common Market foreign ministers, it contained considerable advantages for Israel, including an up to 50 percent reduction of tariffs on its manufactured goods and a 30 to 40 percent reduction on its agricultural products in return for a 10 to 30 percent decrease in its duties on European imports.86


Wolfmann (1923–1975), a freelance journalist, was born in Germany and immigrated to Palestine in 1935. Originally a Communist, he returned first to East Berlin in 1946 before settling in the west two years later. Wolfmann covered the 1952 restitution negotiations and the 1961 Eichmann trial, wrote for two mass circulation newspapers, Die Welt and Yediot Ahronot, for the Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA), and for the Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung, the weekly newspaper published by the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland. See “Alfred Wolfmann zum Gedächtnis,” Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung, July 18, 1975, p. 6.


West Germany had joined the Netherlands in supporting Israel against French opposition and Arab boycott threats; but Bonn officials had also acknowledged the political barriers that continued to impede the associate membership Jerusalem sought, now heightened by the European Economic Community’s momentous decision on June 9 to commence negotiations with Great Britain and three other perspective members.87

As Israel’s chief European trading partner, the Federal Republic was also aware of that country’s mounting trade deficit and the precipitous decline in its foreign reserves, which underlined the urgency of the impending annual aid negotiations.88 Thus the Brandt government was prepared to accede to several pressing Israeli requests, which were based on prior commitments and did not greatly threaten Bonn’s Nahostpolitik. In addition to the millions in annual payments to individual Israeli Holocaust survivors, the advance of DM 200–250 million in restitution funds relieved the strain on Israel’s budget, as did Bonn’s pledge of DM 100 million to care for the needs of severely disabled survivors. Bonn also agreed to defer the repayment of a DM 416.9 million loan until 1975 and reduced its interest from 4.1 to 3 percent.89 Moreover, it reluctantly commenced negotiations with Nahum Goldmann, head of the Claims Conference, for a new agreement on restitution to “post-1965” claimants – Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe who had been excluded from the 1952 Restitution agreement but had recently arrived as refugees in Israel as well as in Europe and the United States.90

But Bonn held the line against an audacious new Israeli proposal: to borrow against the Federal Republic’s DM 80 million gold deposits in the United States in order to make urgent purchases of American arms. Ben-Horin found support for this plan among a few West German cabinet


87 Aufzeichnung, Apr. 28, 1971, PA AA B36/437.
88 In 1969, Israel imported goods totaling $173 million from the FRG and exported those worth only $63 million. Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Report (in French), PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104770.
members, and the Israeli ambassador in Washington obtained endorsements from the Nixon administration; but the new shapers of Bonn’s foreign policy were disinclined to risk the political and diplomatic fallout of such a potentially explosive deal.91

Ben-Horin also encountered a new toughness over West Germany’s annual aid package to Israel. The AA, pointing out the disproportionate amount of assistance to Israel (more than the entire amount of funds given to all of Latin America) and warning of adverse Arab reactions, had called for a DM 20 million reduction.92 Instead, Scheel and Brandt decided to maintain the DM 140 million total but to tie DM 20 million to specific project proposals.93 Once more, Ben-Horin’s protests were futile;94 however, the anticipated Arab remonstrance against the DM 140 million was less vehement than Bonn had feared.95

The Brandt government also responded warily to Ben-Horin’s appeal to guarantee the Cologne-based Rüger Group’s investment in a series of ambitious development projects in Israel.96 Scheel, deeming this a bad precedent and fearing Arab reprisals, was firmly opposed.97 After three stormy cabinet sessions – where both the size of the project and the diplomatic fallout were debated and Finance Minister Alex Möller refused to withdraw his objections – the Rüger proposal was turned down.98

September 1970: Dawson’s Airfield

Two momentous international events occurred in the summer of 1970. On August 7, the US-brokered cease-fire ended the seventeen-month War of Attrition between Israel and Egypt, which had precipitated a Soviet intervention and the threat of a Superpower confrontation. Although Nasser immediately violated its terms by moving almost one hundred SAM missiles up to the Suez Canal zone, the Egyptian leader’s sudden death on September 28 and his successor’s unwillingness to resume hostilities brought the costly conflict to a close, without, however, bringing peace to the region. Nonetheless, it was a major victory for Washington, which had checked Soviet advances in the Middle East, and also for Israel, which won Nixon’s offer of new US F-4 Phantom aircraft and assurances that the United States would not insist on a withdrawal until a satisfactory and binding peace agreement had been achieved.

Next, on August 12, the Federal Republic and the USSR signed their historic treaty in Moscow renouncing the use of force between their two countries and recognizing Europe’s existing borders, fulfilling the Soviet desiderata for Brandt’s Ostpolitik, and clearing the way for the FRG’s rapprochement with Poland, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Both Washington and Jerusalem issued calm public reactions; but for Israel, the pact between Bonn and its Soviet enemy added a painful new element to an already fraught relationship.

The August 7 cease-fire between Egypt and Israel had explosive consequences in Jordan, where Palestinian militants were infuriated over Nasser’s betrayal. For more than three years, Israel’s eastern neighbor had been under severe pressure from the fedayeens: with almost two-thirds of Jordan’s population consisting of Palestinians whose rival leaders (loosely gathered under the PLO) had created a state within a state and now threatened to seize control of the country. Jordan’s monarch, the thirty-four-year-old King Hussein, whose grandfather had been killed by a Palestinian in Jerusalem in 1951, had failed to curb the militants’ growing power. On September 1, the Palestinians launched their

eighth assassination attempt against Hussein. This time, however, the young king responded forcefully, ordering his troops to attack the guerrilla strongholds and launching the on and off, ten-month civil war known as the “Black September,” resulting in the death of some four thousand Palestinian fighters and civilians.103

On Sunday, September 6, 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also jolted the world’s attention to the Palestinian cause. In their most spectacular feat so far, PFLP operatives seized three Western civilian aircraft. They forced two New York–bound planes— a TWA flight out of Frankfurt and a Swissair flight out of Zurich—to land in Dawson’s Field, a World War II British air base thirty miles east of Amman; and after an abortive assault on an El Al plane leaving Amsterdam (which was able to arrive safely in London), two Palestinians hijacked a Pan Am 747 leaving Amsterdam and diverted it to Cairo where, in a gesture of defiance against Nasser’s capitulation to Washington and only seconds after its 171 passengers and crew were evacuated, they blew up the $26 million craft. Three days later, PFLP operatives seized a BOAC flight en route from Bombay to London and forced it, too, to land in Jordan.104

The PFLP announced that in return for freeing the passengers, crew, and three planes parked on Dawson’s Field—now flying the Palestinian flag and renamed the Revolution Airport—it called for the release of its comrades from Western and Israeli prisons: the seven in Europe (the surviving El Al hijacker Leila Khaled in Britain, the three perpetrators of the February Munich-Riem attack in West Germany, and the three Palestinian commandos held in Switzerland for their attack on an El Al plane in February 1969) along with some three hundred Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Ignoring the censure of almost every Arab leader and Soviet-bloc government (but with Radios Hanoi, Beijing, and Pyongyang maintaining an “eloquent silence”), the PFLP intended to exploit its captives on Dawson’s Field to humble the West, humiliate Hussein, upstage Arafat, and claim leadership of the Palestinian cause.105

The United States, whose three planes had been seized and large numbers of whose citizens had been detained, urged the four targeted


governments to coordinate their responses. On September 8, they set up a working group in Bern at the headquarters of the International Red Cross, which dispatched a negotiating team and supporting personnel to Jordan and succeeded in arranging for the transfer of some 125 women, children, and elderly passengers to the Intercontinental Hotel in Amman, while the rest remained inside the three aircraft on Dawson’s Field.

But Washington also recognized the rifts in the multinational front. Nixon’s proposal of an armed US strike to prop up Hussein and free the planes and captives drew negative responses from Bonn, London, and Zurich. The Bern group was also at odds over meeting the Palestinians’ demands, with Germany and Switzerland immediately announcing their willingness to release their Palestinian prisoners, Britain, after hesitating, agreeing to free Khaled, and Israel refusing to surrender any of its Palestinian captives and sharply criticizing any surrender to terrorism. Seeking to widen the West’s divisions, the PFLP proposed a two-stage process, in which women and children would be released first in return for the European prisoners and the rest only after the Israelis relented; but the Bern group insisted that all the hostages would have to be freed at once.

Willy Brandt, braving US objections, dispatched a personal emissary to Amman. On the night of September 11, 1970, his well-connected colleague in the Arab world, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, suddenly arrived in the war-torn Jordanian capital, where he met with Red Cross officials and also with the terrified Germans in the Intercontinental Hotel. The next day, however, the situation changed dramatically. Crediting reports of a US or an Israeli attack, the PFLP suddenly allowed most of the released passengers to leave Jordan; but it also decided to blow up the three planes on Dawson’s Field, creating spectacular explosions in the desert. And after parading the remaining captives before the press, they dispatched their fifty-four German, Swiss, American, Israeli, and English “prisoners of war” to scattered locations. Almost immediately, Israel

retaliated by rounding up 450 West Bank notables with ties to the PFLP who were released after interrogations by the military.114

Wischnewski, proceeding with his mission, on September 13 met with PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who condemned the hijackers but also deplored Bonn’s generous support to Israel. A day later, he met with friendly Jordanian officials who promised support. Finally, on September 15 Wischnewski had a “long talk” with Abu Mayer and several other PFLP officials, who turned down his cash offer for the German hostages but offered the prospect of “two-sided negotiations.”115

Alarmed by Wischnewski’s warning of the danger to the remaining hostages, Bonn shook the Bern group by threatening to negotiate on its own.116 Not unexpectedly, Wischnewski’s escapade raised hackles in Washington, London, and, especially, in Jerusalem, where the Israeli press was outraged by the Bonn emissary’s solo adventure.117

Wischnewski’s mission was halted abruptly by the resumption of heavy fighting. On the morning of September 16, Hussein declared martial law and launched an all-out attack on the fedayeen; but the king’s offensive also provoked a massive Syrian intervention and raised the prospect of Israeli airstrikes and ground attacks as well as a new Cold War confrontation. The Nixon administration went into action, combining military threats with deft collaboration with Moscow, which led to the Syrians’ sudden withdrawal.118 And Nasser, in his final act as Arab leader, on September 27 pushed through a cease-fire between the Jordanian king and Arafat, thereby underlining the PFLP’s inferior status in the Arab world.119

Before the cease-fire was signed, almost all the hijacked prisoners had been freed by the Jordanian army; and on September 29, the PFLP turned over the remaining six Americans to the Red Cross. Once all the captives had left Jordan, the British, West German, and Swiss governments, disregarding Israeli protests, released their seven Palestinian prisoners, who were flown together on a British air force jet to Cairo, where they arrived, almost unnoticed, on the morning of Nasser’s funeral, October 1, 1970.120

118 FRUS 1970, pp. 733 928, passim.
120 Details in Kraushaar, Wann endlich beginnt, pp. 429 33.
The Dawson’s Field crisis ended on a seemingly positive note: Despite the heavy fighting resulting in hundreds of deaths, there were no casualties among the hostages; Hussein had reasserted control over his kingdom; and a US-Soviet confrontation had been averted. On the other hand, the Palestinian problem remained unresolved; and the specter of terrorism – no longer confined to the Middle East – was now threatening the entire world.

The Brandt government emerged from the Dawson’s Field crisis as a new player in the Middle East conflict, one that had not only worked confidently with its partners but had also displayed flashes of independence. Bonn had also deepened its ties with Jordan and the Palestinians. Significantly, the West German public had given its approval to the government’s actions.

For Israel, the hostage crisis had also ended satisfactorily: It had freed no Palestinians in return for the release of its citizens, although on October 14 Israel quietly freed two Algerian and ten Lebanese prisoners as a “humanitarian gesture.” Moreover, its part in blocking a Syrian invasion of Jordan had brought a huge benefit: a strategic alliance with Washington. Because Israel fit in well with the emerging Nixon doctrine – bolstering regional surrogates in the world’s trouble spots, defending US interests without costing US lives, and preventing Soviet inroads into the Arab world – Washington was now prepared to abandon its evenhanded Middle East diplomacy, make Israel a key beneficiary of US economic and diplomatic support, and increase its military aid to Israel from $140 billion between 1968 and 1970 to $1.2 billion between 1971 and 1973.

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121 On Dec. 8, 1970, the UN General Assembly, in a 47 22 vote with fifty abstentions, called for the “self determination of the Palestinian people,” an empty political demonstration according to the Israelis but a major diplomatic victory according to the Palestinians and their Arab and Communist supporters. New York Times, Dec. 10, 1970, p. 12; Weingardt, Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik, pp. 217 18.

122 Another violent year, 1970 witnessed the destruction of the Swissair flight in February along with four major bombing incidents in the United States, one in Israel, and one in Italy; four hijackings (including two against Soviet aircraft); and a kidnapping/murder in Canada. On the responses: Geraint Hughes, “Skyjackers, Jackals and Soldiers: British Planning for International Terrorist Incidents during the 1970s,” International Affairs 90, no. 5 (Sept. 2014): 1013 31; Johannes Hürter, “Anti Terrorismus Politik,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 57, no. 3 (July 2009): 330 48.


Nonetheless, the Meir government was deeply disturbed over Britain’s, Switzerland’s, and Germany’s readiness to cave in to Palestinian terrorism; and it was particularly dismayed by Bonn’s release of the murderer of an Israeli citizen and its dismissal of the consequences. On September 30, a telling exchange occurred at a Bonn press conference, where the government press chief Conrad Ahlers parried Alfred Wolfmann’s query—“What guarantee do you have that the terrorists’ release will not encourage other terrorist organizations to continue their attacks on German soil?”—with the mordant reply, “Of course there is no guarantee whatsoever, just as there is no guarantee of the continuation of Israel’s policies.”

The Kniefall

During the last months of 1970, the Bonn government attempted to counter the rumors of its deteriorating relations with Israel. Brandt, who was also concerned over American Jewish opposition to his policies, dispatched Horst Ehmke to the United States. In his meetings with the heads of the major organizations, Brandt’s chief of staff downplayed the threats from West Germany’s far-left- and far-right-wing radicals and claimed that Ostpolitik would not adversely affect Bonn’s ties with Israel. Similarly, Scheel, who agreed to meet Eban in New York during the UN General Assembly meeting, insisted that there was no change in their bilateral relations; but, pleading the pressure of work-related travel, he also declined to set a date for his return visit to Israel. That fall, Brandt initiated two other high-profile visits: by the socialist banker Walter Hesselbach, who traveled to Washington and Jerusalem to emphasize the solidity of Bonn’s ties with Israel; and by Alfred Nau, the SPD’s central committee member and treasurer, who met with his Labor Party comrades in Israel and prepared the arrival of an SPD parliamentary delegation in Israel early in the next year.

There was one area in which West German–Israeli ties remained solid: their military collaboration. Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt, to whom Ben–Horin had direct access, welcomed the Israeli reports on the Soviets’ military tactics and hardware during the War of Attrition. And despite the AA’s efforts to curb this relationship, Brandt allowed the Defense Ministry not only to continue to purchase Israeli military devices – mortars, hand grenades, propellants, igniters, and Leopard tank engines – and jointly develop military hardware but also to meet regularly with its Israeli counterparts to exchange information.

As Brandt approached the anniversary of his first year in office, his government was in crisis. Economic conditions were improving; but at the beginning of October, three FDP members defected to the CDU, leaving him with a mere six-vote majority in the Bundestag. After ten months of difficult negotiations, the treaty with Poland had been drafted; but Brandt now faced mounting criticism, right-wing protests, and even death threats over his agreement to acknowledge the Oder-Neisse border and the loss of forty thousand miles of former German territory to Poland, desert the expellees, and abandon the remaining Germans in Poland. There was also widespread disgruntlement over the stalled talks with East Germany and the Four Power talks on Berlin. Indeed, the fate of Brandt’s Ostpolitik rested on a Berlin settlement, which depended upon a US-Soviet agreement.

The Federal Republic’s ties with the Jewish world and with Israel remained brittle; and one of Brandt’s closest advisors, Klaus Harpprecht, suggested a public gesture of rapprochement. But when Scheel visited Auschwitz on November 8 (the first West German official to set foot there) and omitted any reference to the Jewish victims who had perished in the death camp, the barrier between Brandt’s new Germany –

133 Harpprecht to Brandt, Oct. 2, 1970, AdsD WBA A4/8. In his reply on Nov. 3, ibid., Brandt maintained that “at the present time we have no urgent bilateral problems with Israel” but agreed to seek ways to follow up on Harpprecht’s suggestions.
which looked to the future – and those who maintained the omnipresence of the Holocaust rose higher. 134

Willy Brandt’s arrival in Warsaw on December 7, 1970 to sign the treaty of reconciliation with Poland set the stage for one of contemporary history’s iconic political moments. After placing a wreath at the tomb of Poland’s Unknown Soldier, Brandt, at his own request, proceeded to the monument to the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. There, the German chancellor – in a stunning, spontaneous, and silent gesture – fell to his knees, head bowed and hands folded, and stayed still for an entire minute. While the film cameras clicked and buzzed, some three hundred Polish and German onlookers watched in shocked silence. 135

134 In the Auschwitz memorial book, Scheel wrote: “In the face of these horrors, this inhumanity, it must be our task to preserve these highest values: the dignity of man and peace between nations.” [Angesichts dieses Grauens, dieser Unmenschlichkeit: Unsere Aufgabe ist es, diese Werte zu wahren: die Würde des Menschen und den Frieden zwischen den Völkern.] Text of protest by the chairman of the Polish Jewish Ex Servicemen’s Association, London, Nov. 19, 1970, The American Israelite, Nov. 26, 1970.

To be sure, the Kniefall was almost eclipsed by the year-end debate over Brandt’s Ostpolitik. Influential US figures, including former secretary of state Dean Acheson, chastised his appeasement of the Soviets. Brandt’s West German critics accused the chancellor of abandoning the nation’s interests, violating the constitution, and committing treason. The Warsaw Treaty also revived the threat of right-wing violence in the Federal Republic and stirred renewed death threats against the chancellor.

With his Kniefall, Brandt projected the essence of his bold diplomacy. The image of the kneeling chancellor, which appeared throughout the world, became the symbol of a new Germany: Twenty-five years after World War II and now led by an anti-Nazi émigré, the Federal Republic sought to solve the German question on its own terms through reconciliation with the Third Reich’s victims – and not only by offering substantial political and territorial concessions but also through its chancellor’s voluntary act of contrition. In that singular moment, Brandt personally accepted his nation’s guilt in order to move on to a more peaceful future.

At the time, however, Brandt’s gesture received a mixed reception. His Polish hosts, still pursuing their anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli campaigns begun in 1967, were discomfited by the highly sensitive location; and the rest of the Communist world either downplayed the Kniefall’s significance or viewed it as masking Bonn’s militarists and revanchists. Although the New York Times, Le Monde, and other major newspapers gave it front-page coverage, Brandt’s Western allies were similarly reserved, and the French president was reportedly “shocked” by Brandt’s gesture. West Germans were profoundly divided by the Kniefall. Although the mainstream press reported the event either approvingly or without comment, Die Welt depicted it as a symbol of “capitulation and subjection.” In a poll conducted by Der Spiegel, only 41 percent of the population approved of Brandt’s gesture, 48 percent called it...
“exaggerated,” and 11 percent had no opinion. 143 Yet regardless of the public’s response, it was apparent that their kneeling chancellor had forever changed West Germany’s place in the world.

For Israel, on the other hand, where images of Brandt’s Kniefall appeared on the front pages and also on television, the reaction was muted. 144 Once more, the Meir government was embarrassed by Alfred Wolfmann’s savage attack on Brandt and did its utmost to reduce the political damage. 145 Nonetheless, in the Springer press’s Welt am Sonntag on December 20, Wolfmann scolded the chancellor for his silence over Hitler’s Jewish victims during his Warsaw visit. 146

From a longer perspective, Brandt’s Kniefall in Warsaw represented an important moment in West German–Israeli relations. In its pursuit of peace in Europe and the achievement of its national goals, the Brandt-Scheel government had accepted the post–World War II territorial status quo and publicly renounced the use of force to alter it. The chancellor’s public expression of penance underlined the new Germany’s determination to lift the burden of the past and embark upon ambitious foreign initiatives.

Israelis recognized the underlying message of Brandt’s bold and silent gesture. 147 Refusing to disarm and to cede territory without winning secure borders, their government intended to draw even closer to its new friends in Washington; and it would become even warier of those in Bonn intent on courting its enemies.

143 “Kniefall angemessen oder übertrieben?” Der Spiegel 51 (Dec. 14, 1970). Among those deeming it appropriate, 46 percent were between the ages of 16 and 29, 37 percent between 30 and 59, and 47 percent 60 or older (and 43 percent males, 41 percent females). Among those deeming it inappropriate, 42 percent were between 16 and 29; 54 percent between 30 and 59, and 41 percent older than 60 (47 percent males, 48 percent females). And among the undecided, 12 percent were between 16 and 29, 9 percent between 30 and 59, and 12 percent 60 or older (10 percent males, 11 percent females).

144 Wolffsohn and Brechenmacher, Denkmalsturz?, pp. 135 36.

145 On Dec. 20 in Yediot Achronot, Wolfmann criticized Brandt’s “tactless gesture” in appearing before a “Jewish site of memory” with his head uncovered and castigated Brandt for excluding Jews from his Warsaw entourage while including the former Nazi Ernst Achenbach; government response in Avner to Editor, Yediot Achronot, Jerusalem, Dec. 22, 1970, ISA 130 4573/4sfn.


147 On Dec. 8, the Jerusalem Post characterized it as being aimed more at reconciliation with Poland than with Israel.
The Israelis must finally learn that because there are no old Nazis in this government it is not subject to blackmail.¹

Every German is a son of death.²

*In May 1971, West Germany’s third ambassador, Jesco von Puttkamer, arrived in Israel to a cordial but guarded reception.*³ The fifty-two-year-old scion of Pomeranian aristocrats, Puttkamer was the son of a general and was also a former Wehrmacht officer who, following his capture in Stalingrad, had joined the officers’ unit of the Soviet-sponsored Nationalkomittee Freies Deutschland. After the war, Puttkamer had settled in West Berlin, become a journalist, and in his affecting 1948 memoir recounted his “mistakes and guilt.”⁴ In 1957, he joined the SPD and in 1959 was named chief editor of the party’s organ, Vorwärts, which over the next twelve years he transformed into a respected national weekly.⁵

Puttkamer’s unusual appointment was part of an ambitious political initiative by the Brandt-Scheel government to replace Adenauer-era officials with supporters of Ostpolitik.⁶ Nominated by his friend Willy Brandt (although blocked by Walter Scheel from his preferred assignment to Warsaw, which went to a more seasoned

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¹ Walter Scheel, quoted in *Der Spiegel* 23 (May 31, 1971), p. 30, on the eve of his first visit to Israel in July.
² Protests by the right radical Betar youth group during the *Deutsche Kulturwoche*, *Der Spiegel* 47 (Nov. 15, 1971), p. 128.
³ *Davar*, May 20, 1971; also Hensel to AA, Tel Aviv, May 2, 1971, PA AA B36/461; Puttkamer to AA, May 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 1971, ibid., B36/459.
diplomat), Puttkamer, who had long-standing ties with the Israeli Labor Party, was determined to set West German–Israeli relations on a new footing. After a shaky beginning, Puttkamer moved quickly to draw the two peoples closer together. Yet less than five months after his arrival, with his announcement of the first German Culture Week (Deutsche Kulturwoche) in the state of Israel, the new ambassador would stir up a serious political crisis.

Whither Détente and Ostpolitik?

In 1971, the Soviet Union and the United States remained resolute rivals. Despite significant agreements – including the breakthrough in the SALT negotiations on ABMs in May, the Four Power Agreement on Berlin in September, and the surprise announcement in October of the first US-Soviet summit in five years to be held in Moscow in May 1972 – the Superpowers continued to vie in the Middle East and in Asia. On May 27, 1971, the Kremlin, aiming to restrain Sadat’s overtures to the West, concluded its first pact outside the socialist camp: a fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Egypt; and on July 15 the Nixon administration, still bogged down in Vietnam, startled the world by announcing Kissinger’s visit to China and the president’s impending trip to Beijing – three months before the Moscow summit. Moreover, in December the Soviet Union and the United States supported the opposing sides during the brief but brutal Indo-Pakistani war.

The course of Ostpolitik in 1971 was similarly uneven. With his commanding presence in the formulation of West German foreign policy, Brandt was more determined than ever to stake out an independent path toward the East, to be sure “in coordination with our [Western] partners.” Continuing Bonn’s activist personal diplomacy, Brandt met with Brezhnev in the Crimea in September, and Scheel met with Gromyko in Moscow in November.

To be sure, there were important arrangements still to be made with Moscow over the creation of a joint economic commission to promote and facilitate bilateral trade as well as an agreement over expediting the release of ethnic Germans wishing to leave the Soviet Union, both connected to the still pending ratification of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties; Aufzeichnung, Bonn, Feb. 26, 1971; Beziehungen zur SU, Dec. 1970 1972, PA AA B1/517.

8 Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 25, 1971, PA AA B36/462.
10 To be sure, there were important arrangements still to be made with Moscow over the creation of a joint economic commission to promote and facilitate bilateral trade as well as an agreement over expediting the release of ethnic Germans wishing to leave the Soviet Union, both connected to the still pending ratification of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties; Aufzeichnung, Bonn, Feb. 26, 1971; Beziehungen zur SU, Dec. 1970 1972, PA AA B1/517.
magazine’s Man of the Year, and in October he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for “stretch[ing] out his hand to former enemies and introduc[ing] a policy of reconciliation.”

However, Bonn’s efforts in 1971 to woo its East European Communist neighbors ran aground because of political, historical, and practical obstacles. The Federal Republic’s attempts to expand scientific, trade, and cultural ties with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia were hamstrung by the absence of formal agreements; and its overtures for closer economic ties were thwarted not only by those countries’ centralized bureaucracies but also by their demands for reparations for Nazi atrocities. Moreover, Brandt’s envoys faced other sensitive issues: with Poland and Romania over allowing German emigration; with Czechoslovakia over the status of the 1938 Munich accord; and with East Germany over the myriad of details emerging from the Quadripartite Agreement. One of Bonn’s brightest moments occurred in May with the historic visits of President Gustav Heinemann and Foreign Minister Walter Scheel to Romania, although this renegade Communist country, falling increasingly under autocratic rule, now occupied a diminished political and economic role in the FRG’s Ostpolitik.

Bonn’s Diplomatic Agenda

Now entering his second year in power, Brandt faced several domestic challenges. In addition to fierce CDU/CSU opposition to his Ostpolitik and electoral setbacks in several states, Brandt had to fend off youthful left-wing critics demanding more radical economic policies. In the meantime, his government’s ambitious reform programs and the increasing budget deficits and inflation had drawn opposition from both industry and labor unions and forced a cabinet shakeup in May in which the

controversial Schiller had become the “superminister” of economics and finance.\(^\text{15}\)

On the diplomatic front, there were other problems. Bonn’s relations with the United States and its European partners were shaken by its unilateral decision in May to float the mark; and the turmoil in the international money markets, exacerbated by the August 15 “Nixon shock” ending the US dollar’s convertibility to gold, persisted until the end of the year.\(^\text{16}\) Bonn fretted over the threat of US troop reductions in Europe;\(^\text{17}\) and although the United States, Britain, and France, staunchly supported the safety of West Berlin, they were suspicious of Brandt’s Ostpolitik.\(^\text{18}\) Moreover, the FRG’s growing tensions with Paris over the European Economic Community’s agricultural policies and its partner's foot-dragging over a closer European political and economic union erupted in July 1971 after Scheel reversed his adherence to the EEC’s first (French-led) initiative to play an active role in the Middle East.\(^\text{19}\)

The FRG’s efforts to improve its ties with the Arab world achieved only partial success in 1971.\(^\text{20}\) While the Arab League, restrained by hard-liners Iraq and South Yemen, continued to delay a collective decision to reverse the 1965 ban, Brandt dispatched Wischnewski on personal missions to Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan to encourage these governments to go

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\(^{19}\) Gespräch des Staatssekretärs Frank mit dem französischen Botschafter Sauvagnargues, July 12, 1971, AAPD 1971 2:1113 17, during which the ambassador conveyed French foreign minister Maurice Schumann’s “outrage” over German behavior that had threa

\(^{20}\) At his Jan. 29, 1971, semiannual meeting with French president Pompidou, Brandt had announced a “fresh look” at the Middle East. AN Pompidou 5AG 1010; also Redies Aufzeichnung, Apr. 19, 1971, AAPD 1971 1:633–35.
it alone. However, these private talks were delicate on every level, not only raising French and Israeli suspicions but also affecting Bonn’s Ostpolitik: Because all three Arab countries had already established diplomatic relations with East Germany – an entity with which Bonn had not yet concluded a political accord – the restoration of diplomatic relations raised the unwelcome prospect of two hostile embassies in the same capital. Moreover, there would be heavy economic costs for recognition.

Nonetheless, by the end of the year, after Bonn received positive signals from Algeria and Sudan – in defiance of the Arab League – West Germany prepared to restore diplomatic ties.22

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Israel’s Diplomatic Goals

Israel also faced challenges at home and abroad. In the wake of galloping inflation and the Nixon shock, in August the government suddenly devalued the currency by 20 percent and also froze bank credits and imposed stiff price controls. By midyear, there was good news from the influx of six thousand Soviet Jews, which nonetheless strained the Israeli budget and social services; but there were also mounting class tensions arising from the wealth and educational gap between Israel’s Ashkenazi (European-origin) citizens and those from North Africa and the Middle East, erupting in violent demonstrations by the Black Panther movement. Some quarter million of the country’s inhabitants (out of a total population of three million Israelis) were living in poverty; but the Israeli government, with a $1.925 billion military budget (25 percent of GNP) in 1971, a fiscal deficit of $1.4 billion, and a national debt of $3.4 billion, was forced to limit spending on housing, education, health, social welfare, and infrastructure and to rely heavily on foreign aid and private philanthropy.

Israeli diplomacy was dominated by the threat of new violence in the Middle East. Urged by the Nixon administration, Israel agreed to reopen the talks led by UN intermediary Gunnar Jarring. On February 15, Egypt’s new president, Anwar Sadat, determined to regain the Sinai, offered to make peace in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal; but Golda Meir’s cabinet, dominated by hawks intent on achieving territorial adjustments, refused.

Sadat’s second initiative for an interim solution fared no better: Cairo’s proposal for an Israeli withdrawal to some forty kilometers east of the Suez Canal, a reduction of forces on the Egyptian side, and the reopening of the canal also met with skepticism in Jerusalem. However, it drew a positive response from the US State Department, which spotted a shift in Egypt’s orientation and an opportunity to remove Soviet forces from the Middle East. Stepping in as mediators, Secretary of State

23 Details in Barnes to FCO, Tel Aviv, Aug. 23, 1971, GB NA FCO 17/1559; also Barnes, Israel after Devaluation, Sept. 15, 1971, ibid.
William Rogers and his assistant Joseph Sisco shuttled between Cairo and Tel Aviv, but they failed to obtain Israel’s assent.27 Despite renewed pressure from Washington, Meir insisted on Sadat’s aggressive intentions. Moreover, she was reluctant to “go down in Israel’s history as the first prime minister who handed over territory.”28

Israel came under increasing pressure from Washington. In November, the Nixon administration, in anticipation of the 1972 Moscow summit (and requiring Brezhnev’s assistance to end the Vietnam War), passed on to Jerusalem a Soviet proposal for a two-stage peace settlement, and the US president urged Meir to “show some flexibility.”29 But Nixon, who was preparing his reelection campaign, faced an Israeli prime minister still backed by a majority of her fellow citizens who were convinced they were locked in a “war of no choice.” During her visit to Washington in December 1971, Meir rejected any US-Soviet arrangement on the Middle East without Israeli agreement, called for a continued flow of American arms, and insisted that Israel, if necessary, could stand alone. Nixon on his part had now decided to bypass the UN and State Department démarches and turn Middle East questions over to his supple and activist National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.30

Israel’s relations with the Soviet Union, broken by Moscow in 1967, remained at a standoff. In May 1971, Meir and Eban signaled their interest in an improvement;31 and the Soviet leadership, suspicious of Sadat (and also fearing a new explosion of hostilities and its exclusion from a US-dominated Middle East), dispatched Yevgeny Primakov, a former Pravda Middle East correspondent and KGB agent, on

27 See reports of Sisco meetings with Eban, July 30, Aug. 2, 4, 1971, AE/0187.
a secret mission to Jerusalem.32 Primakov, however, after his candid and occasionally heated meetings with Meir, Eban, and Dayan, concluded that although the Israelis desired better relations (among other reasons, to assert their independence from the United States), they were unready to evacuate the occupied territories under either Superpower or UN auspices.33

On the Israeli side, these talks with the Soviets not only sent a useful signal to Washington and the Arabs but also were aimed also at bolstering Israeli efforts on behalf of Soviet-Jewish emigration. Although the number of Jews leaving the USSR for Israel rose markedly, reaching more than thirteen thousand by the end of 1971, there were still impediments that Jerusalem hoped could be removed.34

But the Kremlin on its side resented Israel’s covert role in the burgeoning international anti-Soviet campaign. This included the international outcry over the trial and sentencing of the Leningrad hijackers,35 protests to the UN Human Rights Commission over Moscow’s treatment of its Jewish citizens,36 and especially the convocation of the February 1971 Brussels Conference for Soviet Jewry: a gathering of some 750 Jewish leaders from some forty countries and attended by the eighty-five-year-old David Ben-Gurion and Herut leader Menachem Begin, and which received a warm welcoming message from Golda Meir.37 After the Belgian government had rejected Moscow’s protests, the two-day

33 E. M. Primakov, Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes in the Middle East from the Cold War to the Present, trans. Paul Gould (New York: Basic Books, 2009), pp. 261-73; these talks were confirmed by Eban, Nov. 30, in his meeting with British foreign secretary Home, GB NA FCO 30/876. After a second round of talks over a partial settlement was held in Vienna October 7-15 between Primakov and two Israeli Foreign Ministry officials proved equally fruitless, the next meeting did not occur until March 1973. Primakov, Russia and the Arabs, pp. 274-79.
35 On June 15, 1970, a group of fourteen Soviet Jews and two supporters attempting to hijack an aircraft to reach Israel were captured, tried for high treason, and convicted in Dec. After two of the leaders received death sentences, worldwide protests, led by Israel, forced the Soviet government to reduce the sentences. Wallis to FCO, Tel Aviv, May 19, 1971, GB NA FCO 17/1572.
36 Moscow was particularly sensitive to these protests, because 1971 was the first year that the HRC began investigating specific complaints. Gehlhoff to AA, New York, Aug. 18, 1971, PA AA B30/511.
meeting took place February 24 and 25, 1971, and featured several fiery anti-Soviet speeches. The “Brussels Declaration” called upon the USSR to guarantee its Jewish citizens’ cultural and religious existence and their right to emigrate and “put an end to the defamation of the Jewish people and of Zionism,” and the delegates pledged to work through their governments, the United Nations, and every agency of public opinion on behalf of Soviet Jewry.38 Although Pravda dismissed the event as “a joint American-Israeli action aimed at . . . distracting the attention of world public opinion from the United States’ aggressive policy in Indochina and Israel’s aggressive policy in the Middle East,” the Kremlin was disturbed over this intervention in its internal affairs and the new threat to détente and to its relations with the Arab world.39

Thus despite press speculation over an imminent restoration of Soviet-Israeli ties40 – fed by the well-publicized visit of a delegation of left-wing Israelis to Moscow in August 1971 – without an Israeli pullback from the occupied territories (which, Soviet authorities quietly insisted, would also facilitate Jewish emigration), there was little prospect of a change in the brittle status quo between Jerusalem and Moscow.41

Israel’s third diplomatic challenge was its relationship with the European Economic Community, which had recently become its largest export market ahead of the United States and the UK. There were four issues of concern.42 Because of Israel’s exclusion from the Group of 77 of developing countries (established in Geneva in 1964), it was omitted from the EEC’s generalized preference scheme that came into force on July 1, 1971, and which included the Arab states as well as countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico.43 The Israeli government also feared the Europeans’ willingness to succumb to the Arabs’ pressure to observe their boycott.44 Moreover, the impending

41 Huré to MAE, Tel Aviv, Oct. 26, 1971, FMAE Europe/URSS 1971 76 Z3903.
42 June 8 report to Bonn embassy of Puttkamer Sapidor conversation, June 7, 1971, ISA 130 4572/398.
43 Israel/EWG, Nov. 16, 1971, BAK B36/8000.
entry of Great Britain – a major low-tariff importer of Israeli plywood, citrus fruits, and agricultural products – represented a new threat to Israel’s economic well-being.45

But, above all, Israel was alarmed by the decision taken at the first EEC foreign ministers’ gathering in Munich in November 1970 to formulate its first-ever unified foreign policy position, and to focus it on the Middle East.46 The initiative had come from France, with the threefold aim of adding a European presence to the Superpower and UN deliberations, unblocking the Middle East peace process, and promoting the common interests of the Six (among them, ensuring a stable energy supply from Arab oil producers). Israel responded swiftly to this development. In his protests in Bonn, Ben-Horin insisted the proposal had emanated from a “hostile” government, one that had broken its arms agreements with his country and was selling military supplies to its sworn opponents.47

But Israeli pressure on the Federal Republic was to no avail.48 On April 27–28, 1971 the EEC’s Political Committee, meeting in Paris, drew up a detailed proposal, which on May 13 it presented to a secret meeting of the six EEC foreign ministers at the Quai d’Orsay, chaired by French foreign minister Maurice Schumann.49 Despite their striking differences over the Israeli-Arab conflict, after two days of deliberation the six diplomats adopted Western Europe’s first collective proposal to bring peace in the Middle East.50

The “Schumann paper” (as it was and still is widely known) went considerably beyond the 1967 UN Resolution 242. It called for an

49 The two day Paris meeting also took up the question of EEC expansion and the Soviets’ proposal for a European Security Conference. French text of draft document: Redies Aufzeichnung, Apr. 28, 1971, AAPD 1:666 71.
Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands (while also acknowledging the possibility of “minor” territorial rectifications) and for the creation of demilitarized zones policed by a multinational UN force; the internationalization of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem; and a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem that included a choice of repatriation to their former homes. And while repeating the Security Council’s admonition against acquiring territory by force, the Schumann paper replaced the UN’s call for “the acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force” with an only vague recommendation of a “system of collective guarantees.” Although the details were not published, Schumann immediately hailed the Six’s accomplishment and transmitted its recommendations to the UN and to interested governments in the region.\(^51\)

Israeli reaction was swift and furious. Through diplomatic channels, in the press, and privately, the Meir government criticized the EEC’s “outrageous” interference in the currently delicate Israeli-Egyptian negotiations.\(^52\) While acknowledging the Six’s right to discuss foreign policy, Israel – using the analogy of the quadripartite negotiations over Berlin (of which the FRG was continually apprised by its allies) – contested the EEC’s issuing a collective statement without communicating with the affected party.\(^53\) Even though its protests ultimately resulted in the EEC’s abandonment of the Schumann paper,\(^54\) Israel had to acknowledge Western Europe’s determination to speak in a single voice and the will of Brandt’s government – seeking better relations with the Arab world and reluctant to act alone in the Middle East – to endorse this disquieting development.\(^55\)


\(^{53}\) Raphael to Meroz, June 16, 1971, ISA 130 4572/39m.

\(^{54}\) On the omission of the Middle East issue from foreign ministers’ meeting in Rome: Ben Horin to FM, Nov. 6, 10, 1971, ISA 130 7316 m; unsigned note Nov. 21, 1973, Dossiers du secrétaire général adjoint de la présidence, AN Pompidou AG 5 2 92. On further French efforts to create a united European voice, Patrick Müller, “The Europeanization of France’s Foreign Policy towards the Middle East Conflict From Leadership to EU Accommodation,” *European Security* 22, no. 1 (2013): 117–19.

\(^{55}\) In his June 9, 1971, statement to the cabinet on his European and Middle East policy, Brandt, while stressing the FRG’s “evenhandedness” and acknowledging “special elements” in its relationship with Israel, also insisted, “Because the Middle East problem affects the security of Europe, Western Europe must become involved in this question,” http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/1000/k/k1971k/kap1 1/kap2 20/para3 3 .html.
Germany and Israel: Dealing with Tensions

As part of its quest for closer ties with the Arab world, the Brandt government was determined to strike a new tone in its policy toward Israel, and the Israeli government did its utmost to resist. Brandt, in his carefully crafted speech on May 21, 1971, at the opening of West Germany’s annual Brotherhood Week, both acknowledged his country’s painful history and announced its intention to move forward in the new political environment.56 Ben-Horin, who had urged the chancellor to publicly reaffirm Bonn’s ties to Israel, was gratified by Brandt’s affirmation of the moral and historical justice behind the founding of his country in 1948; but the ambassador was also disgruntled by the chancellor’s reference to the resultant suffering of the Palestinians.57

Five days later during the Socialist International’s reunion of party leaders in Helsinki, there was a tense private meeting between Brandt and Golda Meir, who bluntly challenged the chancellor over the Schumann proposal: “What business is that of the Six?” And Brandt, although unfamiliar with the details, defended the West Europeans’ right to formulate their own political stand and denied France’s sole authorship of the document.58 But while attempting to assuage Meir’s suspicions, Brandt recoiled from the prime minister’s “combative” stance and, especially, her insistence on border adjustments, which would thwart UN, United States, and any European peace initiatives.59

To be sure, there were some small advances in West German–Israeli relations in 1971. In September came an announcement of the first twincity partnership, promoted by Israel, between two tiny entities: Dimona (population twenty-six thousand), a development town in the Negev desert established in 1953 (but also very near the country’s nuclear

57 “It is bitter that the birth of this state required the price of new victims and new suffering. Who would wish to conceal this? Who would wish to hide the misery of the Palestinian Arabs?” Brandt, “Toleranz und Solidarität,” p. 88. Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 21, 1971, ISA 130/4572/39\n.
research center), and Andernach (population twenty-nine thousand), on
the left bank of Rhine and one of Germany’s medieval Jewish communities. More significantly, one month later Tel Aviv University opened Israel’s first Institute of German History, aimed at exploring a subject hitherto shunned by Israeli scholars. This controversial institute had been funded by a five-year, DM 1.7 million grant from the Volkswagen Stiftung, a sum its initiator and founding director assured his critics had not been awarded because of the donor’s “bad conscience” but as recognition of the accomplishments of Israeli scholarship. Nonetheless, under Walter Grab’s astute direction the institute’s research program, its journal, and its international symposia omitted the Holocaust from their agenda; but the institute also injected Israeli voices into the history of Germany’s democratic and working-class movements, into the historic ties between Germany and the Middle East, and into the pre-1933 relations between Germans and Jews.

On the German side, the Israeli presence grew stronger. West Germans in 1971 viewed a growing number of Israeli art exhibitions, as well as theater, opera, music, and dance performances. Thanks to a $600,000 donation from Axel Springer (but only after a heated debate among the musicians, who included several Holocaust survivors), the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra made its first tour of West Germany, visiting all the principal cities. On September 12, the opening night of the Berlin festival, the orchestra’s conductor Zubin Mehta, responding to the enthusiastic audience, led the Israeli national anthem Hatikvah as an encore. There was an increase in Israeli guest professors at German universities; and while the Brandt government focused on its Ost- and Nahostpolitik, President Gustav Heinemann received a number of Israeli guests, among them a parliamentary delegation in March, members of the Histadrut

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61 The initiative had emanated from the Vienna born Walter Grab, who in 1938 at age nineteen had fled with his family to Palestine. In the mid 1960s, he had left a successful business career to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Hamburg, writing his dissertation on the German Jacobins during the French Revolution; upon returning to Israel, he became a professor of German history at Tel Aviv University. Iris Nachum, “Es muss nicht immer Wiedergutmachung sein Walter Grab und das Minerva Institut für deutsche Geschichte an der Universität Tel Aviv,” Tel Aviv Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte 40 (2012): 237–76.


Labor Union in July, and Justice Minister Yaakov Shapiro in September.  

On the bleaker side, because of both countries’ straitened economic circumstances, the number of youth exchanges remained modest. Contributing further to their estrangement, both countries’ media continued to promote stereotyped views of the other. The Israeli mainstream press remained alert to signs of Bonn’s abandonment of its historical responsibility in order to win Arab support. Except for the Springer press, the FRG mainstream publications swamped their readers with articles on Israel’s militarism and its domestic problems. Israel was also indignant over Bonn’s behavior in international forums. For example, on May 18, 1971, West Germany abstained from an Arab-Communist resolution in the World Health Organization accusing Israel of violating the human rights of Arab refugees in the occupied territories and threatening to suspend its voting rights and WHO services if the situation did not improve.

A less-publicized source of friction emerged in 1971 from Nahum Goldmann’s renewed appeal on behalf of those who had been excluded from the 1952 restitution agreement. Goldmann, who had once been welcomed in Bonn by CDU officials (and indeed was still valued by Brandt for his dovish views), received a cool response from the parsimonious officials who now controlled Bonn’s purse strings, had distanced themselves from the Nazi past, and faced the likelihood of even larger claims emerging from Brandt’s overtures to Eastern Europe. And, as Goldmann acknowledged, the German public strongly supported these sentiments.

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65 In 1971, 2,500 Israelis went Germany, while 4,500 West Germans traveled to Israel. Deutsch israelische Jugendbegegnung, n.d. BayHStA StK), MK 64887. According to the American Jewish Year Book (1972), p. 524, the German government spent DM 2.3 million on the student exchange program in 1971.
68 See Chapter 6; also Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 12, Apr. 6, 1971, ISA 130 4572/39yn.
The Year of Visits

In the first half of 1971, Israel, striving to reduce its isolation and enlist supporters from its stronger – and potentially straying – partner, hosted a procession of German politicians from all three major parties. The first visitor between February 17 and 25 was Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, the left-liberal member of the FDP’s national executive committee and state secretary in the Federal Ministry of Education and Science, who had come to alleviate Israeli concerns over her party’s pro-Arab stance. During her long and candid conversations with Meir and Eban, Hamm-Brücher assured her hosts of her party’s good will, and afterward urged her colleague Scheel to hasten his trip to Israel and to “dispel its many concerns.”

The next arrivals between April 30 and May 4, invited by Mapai, were an SPD delegation led by the chair of the party’s parliamentary faction, the strongly pro-Israel Herbert Wehner. Wehner’s group, which met with Israeli labor leaders and politicians, toured the occupied territories, and did its utmost (in what the French ambassador pithily labeled a “charm offensive”) to revive the Israelis’ confidence in Bonn’s fidelity by offering reassuring words about its diplomatic and economic support. Even Wischnewski, Israel’s most distrusted politician, who had a personal meeting with Meir, pledged publicly that the FRG’s efforts to renew its ties with the Arabs would not damage Israel.

The next guest was a prominent opposition figure, the CDU deputy Kurt Birrenbach, a fierce opponent of Brandt’s Ostpolitik and long-

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72 Stirred by an anonymous article in the Freie Demokratischen Korrespondenz, Jan. 13, 1971, which the Israelis believed expressed Scheel’s foreign policy.
75 Hensel to AA, Tel Aviv, May 4, 1971, PA AA B36/462; Sauvagnargues to MAE, Bonn, May 5, 12, 1971, FMAE Europe/RFA 1971 76 Z 2993. Rush to State Dept., Tel Aviv, May 14, 1971, NARA Nixon NSC Box 685 (Germany) reported Meir’s request that Wischnewski convey a peace message to Sadat, and the SPD secretary general’s reluc tance to act as a mediator between the two countries.

Another important SPD visit took place in November when FRG finance minister Alex Möller traveled to Israel for private meetings with Meir and Sapir on restitution issues. See Goldmann to Brandt, Oct. 21, 1971, CZA Z6/2412, Meir to Brandt, Nov. 29, 1971, AdsD WBA A7/53.
time friend of Israel who had taken part in the 1965 negotiations. During his extended stay between May 9 and 19, Birrenbach discussed foreign policy with government officials, Knesset members, diplomats, and industrialists and assured Meir and Eban of his party’s full support.

The most politically significant of these encounters occurred between June 6 and 10, 1971 – on the fourth anniversary of the June 1967 war – when Israel for the first time hosted an official seven-member Bundestag delegation, which was returning their Israeli counterparts’ visit to Bonn in March. Led by the esteemed jurist and Bundestag vice president Carlo Schmid (SPD), the delegation toured all of Israel and – much to the chagrin of the Auswärtiges Amt and of Arab observers – also visited the Golan Heights and Sharm el-Sheikh. During his talks with Meir and Eban, Schmid sought to assuage the Israelis’ outrage over the Schumann paper and reassure his hosts that Bonn’s Ostpolitik and its Nahostpolitik would not harm Israel.

However, these propitiatory visits were only the prelude to the most controversial event of all: the four-day visit of Walter Scheel between July 7 and 10, which was the first trip to Israel by a West German foreign minister. The prospects were ominous. The Arab leaders had warned Bonn that this visit would impair their negotiations for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. And the long delay in Scheel’s response to Eban’s invitation for a reciprocal visit, combined with the foreign minister’s assent on May 13 to the Schumann paper and his alleged warning against Israeli “blackmail”

78 In addition to Schmid, the group included Ernst Benda, Otto Schmidt, and Jürgen Warnke (CDU), Annemarie Renger and Harry Tallert (SPD), Detlef Kleinitz (FDP), and Heinrich Killian (chief of protocol). ISA 130 4573/21sr.
80 In addition to Schmid, the group included Ernst Benda, Otto Schmidt, and Jürgen Warnke (CDU), Annemarie Renger and Harry Tallert (SPD), Detlef Kleinitz (FDP), and Heinrich Killian (chief of protocol). ISA 130 4573/21sr.
published in Der Spiegel on May 31, had all created a tense backdrop to this historic moment.  

Both sides attempted to prepare as calm a visit as possible. The Israeli government was visibly nervous over the large number of contentious issues to be placed before its reluctant guest. But Scheel, after consulting with Brandt, sent a mollifying signal to Jerusalem, labeling the contested Schumann paper simply a “working document” subject to further EEC discussion. On the other hand, Bonn officials insisted that the Israelis treat their visitor respectfully. Brandt’s chief of staff Horst Ehmke warned the Israeli ambassador of Scheel’s acute sensitivity to any form of external pressure, and the government’s official spokesperson Conrad Ahlers pointedly cautioned against any reference to the foreign minister’s Nazi past. The Auswärtiges Amt also stepped in, vetoing an official visit to the occupied territories or the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

The visit opened on a formal note. At the airport ceremony, both Eban and Scheel acknowledged the shadows of the past but expressed their hopes to work together for a better future. But jarring incidents soon erupted: On the winding route to Jerusalem, along the roads to Mount Herzl and Yad Vashem, and throughout most of their travels in Israel, Scheel and his wife would be greeted by small groups of youthful demonstrators carrying placards and shouting anti-German slogans. And at Yad Vashem, the Council’s chairperson Gideon Hausner (the former prosecutor at the Adolf Eichmann trial), in his combative forty-minute

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82 Meroz to Raphael, Jerusalem, June 16, 1971, also FM to Ben Horin, June 8, 1971, ISA 130 4572/39 ṣn.

83 Ben Horin to Meroz, July 1, 1971, Ibid.

84 Ben Horin to Meroz, June 2, 22, 1971, Ibid.

85 Ben Horin to FM, Bonn, June 30, July 1, 1971, Ibid.

Scheel, a decorated Luftwaffe officer in World War II, had applied to join the NSDAP in 1941, although he consistently denied his membership. (See Chapter 6.)

86 Contrary to diplomatic custom, the German national hymn was not performed at the ceremony, although the West German flag was on display.

87 Huré to MAE, Tel Aviv, July 9, 1971, FMAE Europe/RFA 1971 76 Z2993.
address, declared that “Germany’s only way to repent for its crimes and for the death of six million Jews is to assure Israel’s survival and to support its security . . . and let Israel decide for herself what her secure boundaries should be.”

Nonetheless, the official talks went relatively smoothly. Coached by Brandt, in his meetings with Meir and Eban on July 7 and 8 a well-prepared Scheel agreed that their history “could not be forgotten,” and listened attentively to Israeli charges of Soviet intrigue in the Middle East and their negative views on partial solutions and international guarantees. But the FRG foreign minister forcefully refuted Israeli accusations of the (oil-hungry) Europeans’ bias toward the Arabs, cautioned his hosts against confusing Israel’s expanded borders with the attainment of security, and startled them by complaining about the anti-German expressions of the Israeli government and public.

Drawing on his previous experience as foreign aid minister, Scheel was even more direct on July 9 during his two-hour session with Eban and Finance Minister Zvi Dinstein. Once more, he listened attentively to their overview of the Israeli economy and their country’s dire need for trade, investment, and foreign aid; their concerns over the EEC’s prejudicial policies; and their specific issues with Bonn, including the new claims on behalf of Holocaust survivors. Thereupon the foreign minister reminded his hosts that the current “military/political situation” in the Middle East had created an “undoubted impediment” to closer ties between Israel and the EEC. As to their bilateral relations, he rejected the Israelis’ proposal for a special investment agreement between the two governments, insisted that their future economic ties conform to the FRG’s “even-handed” policies in the Middle East, and gave scant encouragement to the new restitution claims.

The formal events concluded, Scheel and his wife, who were visiting Israel for the first time, spent their remaining time as tourists, paying private visits to the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and also visiting Bethlehem. Their Israeli guides accompanied them to the Christian sites in Tiberius.

88 Frank to AA, Tel Aviv, July 7, 1971, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 152535. Scheel was also jarred by Hausner’s reference to the “considerable number” of Nazi war criminals not yet brought to trial and by the “ridiculously light” sentences by the West German courts. He agreed on the necessity of justice but cited “the difficulties of bringing people to trial after so many years.” “Scheel Starts Israel Visit at Yad Vashem,” Jerusalem Post, July 8, 1971, p. 8.


Nazareth, Capernaum, and Tabgha, and they also visited David Ben-Gurion at Sde Boker. On the evening of July 8, Scheel celebrated his fifty-second birthday by hosting a large gala dinner at the King David Hotel.91

On the Israeli side, there were mixed appraisals of Scheel’s visit.92 Eban somewhat fancifully pronounced it “perfect in every respect,” reaffirming the special relationship between the two countries.93 However, the Israeli press detected a “new cool wind” from Bonn, brought by a figure with an only slight interest in their country.94 At the Jerusalem city hall, Scheel had stated emphatically, “What has been done to the Jewish people by my people cannot be forgotten. But we have decided not to live only in the past and to look to the future.”95

On the German side, the visit’s results were even more contested. Initially, the press characterized Scheel’s efforts to dispel Israeli mistrust as a success.96 But when Die Welt, two days after the foreign minister’s return, published a leaked copy of the Schumann paper (whose source – presumably either Israel or France – has never been identified), the CDU lashed out against the government’s diplomatic acrobatics. During the heated Bundestag debate on July 19, Birrenbach accused Scheel of attempting to balance between two stools, thereby damaging the country’s credibility.97 And not only were the Arabs furious over the visit, but now the French government was irate over Bonn’s interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242.98

Scheel’s visit brought a certain amount of clarity to West German–Israeli relations. Israel, despite all the high-profile visits in 1971, had failed to stem Bonn’s new direction or to elicit solid guarantees

92 This was, in fact, Scheel’s only trip to Israel, even after he became FRG president in 1978.
93 Foster to FCO and other missions, Tel Aviv, July 12, 1971, GB NA FCO 17/1488; also Huré to MAE, Tel Aviv, July 12, 1971, AN Pompidou 5 AG 2 1032; Bente Aufzeichnung (discussion with Ben Horin), July 21, 1971, PA AA B36/461.
98 Jackling to FCO and other missions, Bonn, July 15, 1971, GB NA FCO 17/1488. In Israel, Scheel had restated Bonn’s adherence to the English text, calling for an Israeli withdrawal from “occupied territories,” whereas, because of a drafting error in 1967, the French version called for a withdrawal from “the occupied territories.” But in view of the Rogers proposals allowing for minor territorial adjustments, France’s outrage was somewhat questionable.
of its support.99 Despite the West Germans’ repeated assurances – public and private – that their ties with Israel would not be impaired by their Ost- and Nahostpolitik, the anti-Soviet bond that had long linked the two countries was no longer operative,100 and, as Scheel had made clear, the Brandt government’s determination to pursue an active role in the Middle East – alone and with its European partners – had set strict limits on what would be diplomatically possible.

**Excursus: Arms and Aid**

The public encounters between West Germans and Israelis in 1971 also affected two key areas of their relationship: arms and aid. Both issues had diplomatic as well as domestic consequences, needed to be conducted with the utmost secrecy, and stirred internal debates in Bonn.101

Despite the brakes that had been applied by the new German government in 1969, Israel’s military ties with the FRG had continued. Israel had an ardent defender in Defense Minister Helmut Schmidt, who considered Israel “very important” to Germany and to Europe in the defense of the eastern Mediterranean against Soviet expansion; Schmidt also maintained that Israel contributed to Bonn’s military capabilities.102 But the Auswärtiges Amt, bolstered by protests from the FRG’s Cairo emissary, opposed any expansion of the arrangements between the two countries’ military establishments, which, they claimed, endangered Bonn’s Nahostpolitik and also encouraged further GDR and Soviet-bloc incursions into the Middle East.103

On September 7, 1971, the Auswärtiges Amt exerted its muscle. It came in the form of a negative response to London’s request, delivered three months earlier, for official approval of the export of three pieces of German equipment for the production of three German-designed submarines by the British firm Vickers, which

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99 “Israel has our support, but not our blind adherence. We support it diplomatically when its existence is at stake but we must not sanction all its expansionist claims, or its domestically motivated vagueness. Peace in the Middle East is too precious a goal for us to be determined by only one party in the conflict.” Sommer, “Zwischen zwei Feuern,” Die Zeit, July 16, 1972.

100 Horch Aufzeichnung, Mar. 24, 1971, PA AA B36/456, based on extensive talks with Israeli Foreign Ministry officials.


102 Schmidt statement to cabinet, June 9, 1971, quoted in Redies Aufzeichnung, AAPD 1971 2:953; Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 21, June 22, 1971, ISA 130 4572/399n.

would be sold to Israel. Overruling the Defense Ministry’s positive recommendation, disregarding British and Israeli appeals, and also ceding a lucrative opportunity for German manufacturers, Scheel based his refusal on the Brandt government’s official guidelines prohibiting the sale of weapons to areas of tension; but above all, AA officials feared a disruption of Bonn’s negotiations with Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan, who were still incensed over the foreign minister’s visit to Israel and over reports of secret West German arms deliveries to Israel via the Netherlands. In the end, however, the Brandt government would smooth the way for the submarines to be built in Britain.

The Auswärtiges Amt also attempted to curb the FRG’s direct military ties with Israel. For more than a decade, the two countries had quietly collaborated in military purchases and in research and development; and the West German Defense Ministry, working in concert with the Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst), had engaged in extensive intelligence sharing with Israel on enemy weapons systems, to the benefit of both sides. After extensive consultations in December 1970 with Israeli diplomats, defense officials, and arms manufacturers, the Defense Ministry had decided to challenge the AA and push for an expansion of bilateral trade and of joint military projects with Israel.

107 Oncken Aufzeichnung, Jan. 21, 1971, Dietrich Aufzeichnung, Mar. 4, 1971, AAPD 1971 1:93 96, 106, 403 7, setting out the AA’s position against providing arms to Israel.
On March 18, 1971, a well-prepared and forceful Schmidt brought his case before the chancellor and the Federal Security Council (Bundessicherheitsrat), consisting of the foreign, defense, and economics ministers, and he won approval for all but one of his proposals. And at its April 2 meeting the council, overriding Scheel’s objections, approved the Defense Ministry’s modest proposal for a new purchase from Israel of 150,000 illuminating mortar cartridges and the sale of German detonators required for their production (although some of these, it was known, were destined for re-export to Iran).

The year 1971 also witnessed a flourish of military visits. In January, Israeli officers for the first time traveled to Germany, where they met secretly in Hamburg with their German counterparts and with Defense Ministry officials to discuss technical and tactical problems and prepare the way for future consultations; and in June, Yeshayahu Lavie, director-general of Israel’s Defense Ministry, went to Bonn to propose new trade deals as well as a mutual security agreement. On the German side, in April 1971 Major General Dietrich Willikens called on Israeli political and military leaders to discuss their current research and equipment production; in the summer a three-person Defense Ministry delegation inspected the two major Israeli arms firms; and in October Brigadier General Peter Bensien, responding to Lavie’s invitation, toured Israeli laboratories and chemical, arms, and aircraft factories and reported favorably on their state-of-the-art equipment, high level of quality control, and excellent work ethic; but he also noted potential problems in their providing ammunition, uniforms, fuel, and engine fittings to the Bundeswehr.

Collaborative research projects between West Germany and Israel expanded in 1971, particularly in the electronics field and also in rocket...
engines. The **Bundesnachrichtendienst** was also actively engaged: In 1971, it coordinated joint research and testing of electronic countermeasure devices, and Israel, in return for Soviet weapons, received 265 tons of German steel. In his response to the AA’s protests, Bensien assured State Secretary Frank that the FRG was the greater beneficiary of all these covert arrangements.

On another key issue, the FRG’s annual aid package, Scheel kept the promise he had made in Israel on July 9. In a secret session on October 28, 1971, the German cabinet approved the identical DM 140 million figure as in the previous year, but once more set aside DM 20 million for specific projects. And although AA officials had failed to reduce the amount or alter the terms, they were able to limit government guarantees of Israeli development loans from private lenders “in order not to endanger the normalization process” with the Arab states.

**Deutsche Kulturwoche**

Six years after the establishment of diplomatic ties between West Germany and Israel in 1965, a significant gap remained between the two countries: the absence of a bilateral cultural agreement. Despite Bonn’s efforts and the urging of successive FRG ambassadors, neither the Eshkol nor the Meir government had been inclined to expand the relationship beyond the economic, military, and diplomatic spheres. Indeed, this was the one area in which Israel held the upper hand.

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117 In one instance: a joint test in the Negev of a trilateral (German/English/Italian) rocket manufactured by a German company, which caused uproar in Egypt. Bensien to Frank, n.d. [Feb. 1972], BAF BW1 185995; Redies Aufzeichnung, Apr. 12, 1972, AAPD 1972 1:386 87.

118 Bensien Aufzeichnung, Feb. 9, 1972, Aufzeichnung, May 26, 1972, BAF BW1 185995.

119 “In general Israel is the giving partner; our armaments collaboration has been designed to benefit from its military experience.” Bensien Aufzeichnung, Feb. 9, 1972, BAF BW1 185995.

This collaboration was greatly expanded in Oct. 1972 with the launch of the top secret “Operation Caligula” (later changed to “Cerberus”): the joint development of a radar deception jammer enabling NATO forces to penetrate Soviet airspace with minimal losses and for which Germany paid Israeli firms DM 1.6 million over the course of twelve years. Shlomo Shpiro, “Intelligence Services and Foreign Policy: German Israeli Intelligence and Military Cooperation,” *German Politics* 11, no. 1 (2002): 34 36; Shlomo Shpiro, “Cold War Radar Intelligence: Operation Cerberus,” *Journal of Intelligence History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 61 74.


To be sure, German culture was strongly imprinted in the state of Israel. Because of the influx of German and Austrian Jews into Palestine after 1919, followed by the arrival of tens of thousands of largely middle-class and professional Central European refugees after 1933, German culture was manifest in many places: in the structure of Israel’s early childhood education and in its high school textbooks; in the content and methodology of its university faculties of law, medicine, and the sciences, as well as in philosophy, history, and the social sciences; in the country’s classical music and its urban architecture; and even in the organization of the state archives. It was also present in the media, where the mass-circulation newspaper Neuste-Nachrichten (which had adopted the Hebrew name Yediot hadachot [in German Jedioth Chadashoth]) was still avidly read in 1971 by the 6 percent (a shrinking percentage) of Israel’s population who were German-speaking, and known as the yekkes, and who were disproportionally concentrated in the country’s three main cities and major supporters of the arts.

Nonetheless, a formal cultural arrangement was still unwelcome to the majority of the Israeli population, which included the world’s largest number of Holocaust survivors. They retained bitter memories of the Nazis’ mobilization of German Kultur and remained fearful of the old foe’s capacity to dominate their country. They were supported by a government that not only heavily subsidized the country’s artists and cultural institutions but also heavily controlled artistic expression. And in


1961 this government had set strict limits on intellectual and cultural contacts between Germany and Israel that included banning the German language from radio broadcasts and public halls and restricting the showing of German films and the performances of Nazi-sympathizer composers and musicians.125 (Significantly, the Israeli government did not restrict youth- or sports-exchange programs with the FRG, which grew rapidly after 1965.)126

In 1967, the antipathy toward German culture began to wane, spurred by a rising Israeli self-confidence and increased foreign travel. The new direction was exemplified by the lifting of the ban on German films; the stream of visits by German writers, scholars, artists, and musicians; and the steady flow of Hebrew translations of contemporary and older German literature.127 It was also signaled by the quiet opening of the first German Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv in 1969, supported by the West German embassy, which, with its well-stocked library and popular courses, films, and lectures, quickly became a vibrant meeting place between German visitors and Israelis.128

However, the Deutsche Kulturwoche, which took place in the period between November 6 and November 15, 1971, exposed this still-sensitive element of West German–Israeli relations. The initiative had come from Israel. In April 1970, the municipal government of Tel Aviv, which had organized commemorative weeks of Italian and British culture in 1969 and


The Wagner taboo was first broken in 2000 when the Rishon LeZion orchestra, conducted by Holocaust survivor Mendi Rodan, performed the Siegfried Idyll.


127 Na’am Schefi, “The Bitter Interval,” in Efraim Karsh, ed., Israel: The First Hundred Years (London: Routledge, 2014), 1:169 71. Nonetheless, prominent Nazi sympathizers, such as Herbert von Karajan, the renowned conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra, and the famed opera singer Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, were still banned.

128 AJR Information 26, no. 1 (Jan. 1971): 10; Inspektion des deutschen Kulturinstituts in Tel Aviv, Mar. 12, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104782. The Cultural Institute, which had incorporated the private library established by the German Jewish émigré Walter Hirsch in the 1960s, became the Goethe Institut Tel Aviv in 1978.
1970, had invited the West German embassy to plan a similar event.129 By the time Puttkamer arrived in May 1971, preparations for the Kulturwoche were well under way under the direction of the embassy’s Hebrew-speaking cultural officer Christoph Niemöller, nephew of the famed anti-Nazi theologian Martin Niemöller, who had been posted to Israel two years earlier and had guided the establishment of the country’s first German Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv.130 In August 1971, the mayors of Haifa and Jerusalem had offered their collaboration along with the principal Israeli universities, cultural institutions, and media. Moreover, the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Education and Culture, which had all received detailed information, had given their assent to the program; and Meir, Eban, and Yigal Allon had all agreed to welcome Günter Grass, an important participant, who had close ties to the West German chancellor.131

The Deutsche Kulturwoche had an ambitious program comprising twenty-seven events over nine days and aimed at showcasing traditional as well as contemporary German culture for Israeli audiences.132 Following a gala opening on November 6 by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel Aviv, there would be events in all three cities: chamber music concerts; performances by Berlin’s renowned Schiller Theater; readings by Grass from his new work, From the Diary of a Snail; and lectures in Hebrew by the esteemed German-born Israeli philosopher Akiva Ernst Simon on “German-Jewish Interaction: Consequences and Boundaries.” There would also be extended exhibitions in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem of the works of the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine and of antiwar artist Käthe Kollwitz. The program, aimed at underlining the political and cultural ties between Germans and Jews, omitted works directly related to the Holocaust.133

Not unexpectedly, the German ambassador’s announcement of the Deutsche Kulturwoche on October 20 roiled Israeli politics.134 The press was disquieted by Puttkamer’s display of satisfaction – delivered somewhat tactlessly in German – on having overcome a sensitive barrier between their two countries and also by the festival’s title, which evoked

129 Stuttgart had organized the first week of Israeli culture in March 1969, followed by several other West German cities. Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 15, 1971, PA AA B97/329.
130 In his youth, Niemöller had spent three months in Israel working for the International Christian Peace Service and, while serving in the West German consulate in Chicago, had graduated from the College of Jewish Studies. Chicago Tribune, May 19, 1963.
the language of the Nazis.\footnote{135} Also at issue was the timing – November 6–15 – which overlapped with the thirty-third anniversary of the attack on the Jews throughout Nazi Germany on the night of November 9–10, 1938, known as Kristallnacht. The one-month-delayed opening – which had been requested by the Israel Philharmonic because of its European tour – had initially raised no objections from the Israeli side. Israel’s Holocaust Memorial Day occurred in April, November 9 was not a day of remembrance in Israel, and officials at the Yad Vashem memorial had given their approval to the schedule.\footnote{136} Nonetheless, these sinister dates gave Israel’s right-wing opposition – which only recently had protested Eban’s careless comment on US television of his personal lack of interest in the further punishment of Nazi war criminals – another opportunity to assail the Meir government for insulting the victims of the Shoah.\footnote{137} Herut and its supporters, which included numerous Holocaust survivors, insisted it was still “too early” for a Deutsche Kulturwoche, and representatives of former Jewish partisans and survivors called for a boycott.\footnote{138}

Working with the Tel Aviv mayor to calm the atmosphere, Puttkamer agreed to remove his speech from the opening ceremony and delay the gala reception from November 10 until November 15, and the survivor organizations had agreed to confine the demonstrations to silent marches outside the performance halls.\footnote{139} Moreover, the Meir government did its part, burying the opposition’s motion in the Knesset to cancel the Kulturwoche by referring it to the Internal Affairs Commission.\footnote{140} But Puttkamer’s November 4 statement, denying a plot to impose “forgetfulness” of Nazi atrocities or to create a “superficial harmony,” and his characterization of the Kulturwoche as an effort to promote understanding

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[135]{Articles by Evron Ram and Israel Neumann, Davar, Oct. 24, 1971; also Ma’ariv, Nov. 5, 1971.}
\footnotetext[136]{Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 15, 1971, PA AA B97/329.}
\footnotetext[138]{Puttkamer to AA, Oct. 28, 1971, PA AA B97/329. Menachem Rosensaft, “German Culture Week,” Jewish Quarterly (UK) 19, no. 4 (1971): 10 11: “Israel desperately needs every friend and ally she can possibly get. . . However, I am wondering whether large scale testimonials to German culture less than thirty years after the Holocaust are necessary for Israel’s continued existence. They seem to me more than a little degrading” (p. 11).}
\footnotetext[139]{Puttkamer to AA, Oct. 29, Nov. 4, 1971, PA AA B97/329; Puttkamer, who had originally refused this concession, was overruled by the Auswärtiges Amt: Puttkammer to AA, Nov. 3, 1971; Steltzer to Puttkamer, Nov. 3, 1971, PA AA B130/97664; also “Befriedungsaktion vor Beginn der ‘Deutschen Kulturwoche,’” Jedioth Chadashoth, Nov. 5, 1971.}
\footnotetext[140]{Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 3, 8, 10, 1971, PA AA B97/329.}
\end{footnotes}
for the “new Germany” drew a mixed reaction from the Israeli press, which wavered between cautious support and strong opposition from the Far Right and the Left.¹⁴¹

Neither the ambassador nor the mayor nor the Israeli government was prepared for the actions of the Herut party’s Betar youth organization, which had routinely protested West German officials’ visits – most recently by Walter Scheel – and was now joined by newly arrived militants of the US-based Jewish Defense League led by Rabbi Meir Kahane.¹⁴² On the first night, some thirty shouting, placard-waving youths repeatedly interrupted the performance of the Israel Philharmonic in Tel Aviv. In Jerusalem on November 9, they struck again when a small but noisy group halted Günter Grass’s reading at the Hebrew University, and on November 11 when they disrupted the Schiller Theater’s performance with shouts and by pelting eggs at the performers.¹⁴³ Anti-German graffiti were painted outside the German embassy, which was also hit by a stone (causing no damage or injuries). Widely reported at home and abroad, these incidents appeared to demonstrate a still-unbridgeable barrier between the two countries.¹⁴⁴

Rather than risk the political fallout of condemning the rioters, Israeli officials hastened to distance themselves from the *Kulturwoche*. Responding to renewed criticism of the festival’s poor timing – and its very name – the prime minister, foreign minister, and minister of education and culture all denied any foreknowledge of the event; and, much to Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek’s chagrin, his city council withdrew its sponsorship.¹⁴⁵ Meeting with reporters on November 9, Meir issued a cautious statement: “There was no easy way out of a situation where the ‘cold logic’ of today’s world was pitted against the ‘justified emotions’ linked with the past.”¹⁴⁶

But the Israeli prime minister was also reluctant to alienate Bonn.¹⁴⁷

On the day after Grass’s reading was halted, Meir met with the author and

¹⁴¹ Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 4, 5 (2 tels.), Nov. 7, 1971, Ibid.
¹⁴² Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 12, 15, 1971, Ibid.
¹⁴³ Also, on the night of November 8 9 swastikas and the slogan “Remember Kristallnacht” were painted in front of the West German embassy and on parked cars, and stones were thrown at the gate, resulting in increased police presence. Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 9, 1971, Ibid.
¹⁴⁵ Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 8, 1971, PA AA B97/329; *Jedioth Chadashoth*, Nov. 9, 10, 11, 1971.
¹⁴⁷ Meir reportedly also announced, “I have no right to criticize [the demonstrators]. . . . I have no number on my arm.” *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1971.
¹⁴⁸ On the morning of November 8, two days after the first demonstration, the *Jerusalem Post* announced the Bonn government’s annual grant of DM 140 million.
his wife, apologized for the disruption, and sent a request to Brandt to convene an informal meeting of Social Democratic leaders in the coming year to coordinate their Middle East policies with Israel’s.\footnote{148}

Although the protests ceased after November 11, and the \textit{Deutsche Kulturwoche} – as measured by its sold-out performances and glowing reviews – was an artistic and commercial success, analysts termed the German initiative a diplomatic debacle. The list of culprits included the inexperienced FRG diplomat who had committed a tactless act of scheduling; a timid (or deceptive) Israeli government; and a tiny but vocal minority that had seized the spotlight.\footnote{149}

The debate lasted for several weeks. Puttkamer, defending his actions, disputed criticisms of the festival’s “excessively grand title,” insisted that the disruptions had been minimal, and maintained that cultural collaboration between the two countries was steadily advancing, even without a formal agreement. He also protested the abandonment of his Israeli partners, insisting they had approved the dates and content of the \textit{Kulturwoche}.\footnote{150}

Puttkamer’s complaints over Israel’s “double game” were echoed by mainstream Israeli journalists, who questioned the Meir government’s disclaimers, its failure to rein in the protestors, and the shabby treatment of its German guests.\footnote{151} Both West Germans and Israelis criticized the rioters: Günter Grass in his November 11 press conference lashed out at their “irrational militancy,”\footnote{152} and Kollek termed them

\begin{itemize}
\item Grass to Ben Horin, Nov. 10, 1971, ISA 130 4572/40; Grass to Brandt, Nov. 25, 1971, GG/2528. Grass delivered a brief formal letter to Meir from Brandt, thanking her for her congratulations on his Nobel Peace Prize. At the last minute, Grass was also invited to meet with Eban, who added his apology.
\item Puttkamer to AA, Nov. 23, 1971, PA AA B97/329; also Yediot Ahronot, Nov. 11, 1971; \textit{Süddeutsche Zeitung}, Nov. 11, 1971.
\item Grass, who recoiled at the insults hurled at him and his people, at the “scapegoating” of German culture, and at the Israeli government’s refusal to conclude a cultural agreement with Bonn, also plunged into his host’s internal politics, warning that the demon strators’ behavior boded badly for Israel’s treatment of its Arab neighbors, that Israel was no longer an “innocent state” but an “occupying power,” and that its reigning mantra “We have no choice” (\textit{ein breira}) compelled its friends to offer criticism as well as support.
\end{itemize}
more “dangerous to Israeli society” than the *Kulturwoche*.153 Israel’s leading daily also chided the protestors’ supporters. In a lengthy editorial on November 14, *Ha’aretz* pointed out the discrepancy between its fellow citizens’ “yea’s” to the FRG’s economic support and to their Grundig televisions and Volkswagen and Mercedes cars and their “no” to Günter Grass.

The storm over the *Kulturwoche* also resonated in West Germany.154 The mainstream press, while acknowledging the Israelis’ deep-seated anger against the festival, also detected their malaise over the current state of bilateral relations – especially on the eve of the FRG’s reopening its ties with the Arab world.155 The Brandt government did its utmost to assuage its CDU critics, assuring the Bundestag of the careful and bilateral preparations for the *Kulturwoche*, the small number of disruptions, and the large and appreciative audiences; and the chancellor denied any intention of curtailing German visits to Israel.156 On the other hand, Brandt assured the German public that Grass had not functioned as his special emissary to the Israeli prime minister.157

The year 1971 ended on a sour note in West German–Israeli relations. Both countries, facing significant problems at home and abroad, were continuing to draw apart.158 Puttkamer questioned Israel’s refusal to “deepen” their bilateral relations, especially because its “unfavorable geographic position” made it necessary to “avoid isolat[ing] itself.”159 And Yohanan Meroz, the director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s European section, who deemed relations with Germany a “crucial cornerstone of our foreign affairs,” concurred, recognizing that the recent cascade of small and negative
incidents had created a “grim totality.” But during their end-of-the-year consultation, Meroz also reassured Puttkamer that by removing “pseudo-emotions” from their deliberations and conducting “thorough discussions,” a “clearer atmosphere” could yet emerge, even if no formal bilateral cultural agreement was in prospect.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{160} Meroz to Eban, December 30, 1971, ISA 130 4572/40.
Dear Chancellor and Comrade,
I greatly appreciated our full exchange of views in Vienna. . . .

Life demands reconciliation. Reconciliation must not fall victim to terror.

In still another sign of the Federal Republic’s growing prestige, one year after Willy Brandt had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 19, 1972, the fifty-four-year-old Heinrich Böll became the first West German author to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature for his contributions to the “resurrection of German culture.”

The Cologne-born, Catholic humanist and anti-militarist World War II veteran was widely regarded as a “good German” – a defender of the “lamb against the buffalos.” A prominent human rights activist, Böll in 1971 became the first West German to be elected president of PEN International, the organization dedicated to freedom of expression worldwide. And as an outspoken critic of the FRG’s postwar “fat capitalism,” Böll had opposed all three CDU chancellors, endorsed the APO between 1966 and 1969, cautiously welcomed the SPD/FDP coalition, and in January 1972, in a hastily written article,

2 Excerpt from speech by President Gustav Heinemann, Munich, Sept. 6, 1972, https://www.bundesarchiv.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder_dokumente/03626/index_8.html.de.
5 Böll had famously sent fifty roses to the journalist and anti Nazi activist Beate Klarsfeld, who had been sentenced to a one year imprisonment for shouting “Nazi” and slapping Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger in Nov. 1968: Heinrich Böll, “Blumen für Beate Klarsfeld,” Die Zeit, Jan. 10, 1969; cf. interview in Davar, May 15, 1969.
raised a storm of criticism over his defense of the left-wing radical journalist Ulrike Meinhof against the attacks of the Springer press.  

Böll, who was in Greece when his prize was announced, proceeded as planned to Israel for a visit with his youngest son, Vincent, a twenty-two-year-old conscientious objector who was fulfilling his alternative military service at the Institute for the Blind in Jerusalem. It was Böll’s second trip to Israel. Between May 11 and May 19, 1969, as a guest of the foreign ministry, he and his wife had toured the country, met with government officials and Israeli writers (some equally critical of their government’s policies after 1967), delivered a biting critique of West Germany’s democracy gap in Israel’s three major cities, and recounted to Israeli journalists his postwar search for a “humane” German language that had not been “vandalized by the Nazis.”

But Böll’s visit between October 24 and November 8, 1972 (he was accompanied by his wife and his second son, René), occurred at an unpropitious moment, even for an honored writer. The Israeli press and public, still smarting over the Germans’ bungled rescue of their nine captive Olympic athletes, became further incensed on October 29 when, in exchange for the hijacked Lufthansa flight 615, Bonn released the three surviving Palestinian perpetrators. Böll, who was actively campaigning for Brandt, was in a delicate position. Although declining another press conference, he met for an hour with Golda Meir, who briefed him on Soviet-Jewish emigration, Middle East conditions, and

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Heinrich Böll’s private papers, which he donated in 1984 to the municipal archive of Cologne, disappeared in 2009 when the building collapsed in the landslide caused by the municipality’s subway construction, but Böll’s letters to Jenny Aloni and Lev Kopelev, already being prepared for publication, survived.


German-Israeli relations. The prime minister also appealed for a PEN meeting in Jerusalem.9

For two weeks, guided by Vincent, the Böll family explored Israel in a rented car – from the Upper Galilee to the Negev and then from the “dreadful” Gaza strip across the Sinai to the Red Sea. Böll, unimpressed by the traditional Holy Sites – brimming with tourists and souvenirs – was spiritually uplifted by the vast Sinai, despite their several encounters with Israeli guard posts blocking their way.10

Apart from the pleasures of his family’s reunion and his meetings with Israeli friends, the Nobel laureate’s second visit was a disquieting experience. Not only was Böll struck by the persistence of Israeli-Arab antagonism, but also, as part of the generation that had perpetrated the Holocaust, he could not escape the “stigma” of either the “good” or the “bad” German in that fiercely contested environment.11

1972: The United States Ascendant

The Nixon administration, although still bogged down in the Vietnam War (which continued to draw domestic and worldwide condemnation12), reached its highest point in 1972. Despite the war, the US economy


Closer to home, however, Heinrich Böll was not hesitant to become involved in Jewish issues. In 1959, he had helped establish West Germany’s largest Jewish historical archive in Cologne whose purpose, in his words, was to document the “2000 year history of Jewish life in Germany” and combat the reemergence of antisemitism. “Was will die ‘Germania Judaica’?” Heinrich Böll, Werke. Kölner Ausgabe, vol. 24, ed. J. H. Reid and Ralf Schnell (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009), pp. 20–21; also as a champion of the rights of Soviet Jewry, Böll was esteemed by the FRG’s small Jewish community. Van Dam to Zentralrat Directory, Dec. 29, 1970, ZEJD B. 1/7/218.

remained prosperous, and as Nixon headed into his reelection campaign there were the two spectacular diplomatic feats: the visit to China in February that normalized Sino-US relations, and the visit to Moscow in May for the signing of the SALT and ABM treaties, where he and Brezhnev agreed on principles governing US-Soviet relations in the world’s trouble spots. The Soviet Union, burdened by its rivalry with China, heavy aid obligations to its clients and allies, and a restive population— but also bolstered by the buildup of its strategic forces— was still prepared to broaden and deepen détente in order to reap the economic benefits for its sluggish economy.\textsuperscript{13}

Washington also enjoyed predominance in the Middle East as the sole power capable of advancing the peace process by influencing Israel. Although Moscow continued to seek friends in the Arab world, Egypt’s expulsion of the Soviet military advisors in July reflected both the futility of its costly attempts to purchase allies and its inability to force an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.\textsuperscript{14} And in Europe too, despite concerns within the Nixon administration that an expanded EEC would create a rival power, America’s special relationship with Britain remained solid.\textsuperscript{15}

But one global problem eluded Washington’s control: the marked expansion of international terrorism in 1972. That year there were some thirty violent incidents, which included airline hijackings, hostage taking, assassinations, and bomb explosions.\textsuperscript{16} Although at least twenty countries were targets of terrorist groups, Israel was far the principal sufferer with three major attacks: the May 8 PLO seizure of a Sabena Airlines flight to Tel Aviv (which was thwarted by a daring Israeli commando raid


at the airport); the grisly attack inside Lod Airport on May 30 by Japanese Red Army (JRA) members trained in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, killing twenty-six people and wounding seventy;\(^{17}\) and Black September’s seizure and murder of eleven Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics (discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter).

To be sure, the terrorists’ grievances were diverse, they predated the Cold War, and they were inspired more by anticolonial and national separatist movements than by the global struggle between capitalism and Communism. Nonetheless, after the Soviet Union—competing with China for leadership over the Third World—began providing funds and training for Palestinian groups and lending diplomatic support to their cause in the United Nations, the struggle against terrorism became another East-West battleground.\(^{18}\) On December 11, 1972, a US-sponsored UN motion calling for strong legal action against terrorists and their state supporters suffered a stunning defeat by a Communist–Third World proposal to focus instead on the “causes” of international terrorism.\(^{19}\)

**Bonn: Diplomatic Achievements/Domestic Challenges**

The FRG achieved a string of diplomatic successes in 1972. Displaying a new assertiveness toward its West European partners, Bonn played a major role in the EEC’s January decision to admit Britain, Ireland, and Denmark.\(^{20}\) It also led the community’s and NATO’s preparations for the first meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was held in Helsinki in January 1973.\(^{21}\) Despite

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\(^{17}\) Details in Van Dam to Genscher, Jan. 8, 1973, ZEJD B. 1/7 420; also Puttkamer to AA, Tel Aviv, June 6, 1972, PA AA B36/542.


\(^{21}\) Kristina Spohr Readman, “National Interests and the Power of ‘Language’: West German Diplomacy and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,
some friction, Bonn’s relations with the United States remained solid: During his visit in June, Brandt underlined the FRG’s key role as a link between Washington and Europe.22

In addition, Bonn achieved a signal triumph in the Arab world, which was now seeking more freedom from Superpower domination and closer ties with the EEC. Brandt and Scheel’s long and patient efforts (along with Wischnewski’s vigorous missions) bore fruit with the resumption of diplomatic relations with Algeria and Sudan in January, with the Arab League’s formal withdrawal of its boycott in March, and with the reestablishment of ties with Lebanon in April and (most important of all) with Egypt in June.23 The only dark cloud was the specter of Palestinian terrorism, exemplified in late February by the PFLP’s hijacking of a Lufthansa Tokyo–Frankfurt flight and leading to a $5 million ransom payment by the Bonn government.24

Ostpolitik also made considerable progress in 1972, although Bonn was concerned over the Communists’ reluctance to release their German citizens wishing to emigrate.25 The FRG signed a new trade agreement with the USSR in July; in the fall there was an exchange of ambassadors with Poland; and in December the signing of the Basic Treaty with the GDR prepared for the entry of both German states into the United Nations.26 In addition, Bonn expanded its economic reach without risking its ties with Moscow, announcing, on the occasion of Scheel’s visit to

1900 The Year of Munich
Beijing in October, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China and a most-favored-nation treatment for the PRC in December.27

At home, however, the Brandt-Scheel government faced serious challenges, among them a 6.4 percent rise in consumer prices and the defections of coalition members (including the key cabinet minister Karl Schiller).28 On January 28, 1972, responding to the growing threat of left- and right-wing extremism, the chancellor and the minister-presidents of West Germany’s eleven federal states issued the controversial Radicals Decree (Radikalenerlass, also known as the Berufsverbot), barring those holding anti-democratic views from the civil service.29 Between March and May came an outburst of bombing attacks by the Red Army Faction (RAF) – notably on the US Army bases, the Springer Publishing Company, and the Bavarian police – only partially suppressed when its leaders, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, were captured in June. Then in early September came the shock of the murders at Munich.30

The government also achieved string of political successes: In April, Brandt survived a no-confidence vote by a razor-thin majority, in May he secured his Ostpolitik with the passage of the Eastern Treaties with Moscow and Warsaw in the Bundestag; and in the November federal elections – widely termed a “Willy referendum” and in which a record 91.2 percent of the West German electorate participated – the SPD-FDP coalition won an unexpectedly solid 48-seat majority.31 At the end of this

28 On Schiller’s demission: “Ein guter Abgang ziert die Übung,” Der Spiegel 29(July 10, 1972); also Gérard Bökenkamp, Das Ende des Wirtschaftswunders (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 56 57.

Brandt’s victory was also celebrated in the context of social democratic gains in seven other general elections that year (including Australia, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, and New Zealand). SD parties were now represented in nineteen governments, there were twelve SD prime ministers, and two hundred million people were living under social democratic rule. Bureau Meeting of the Socialist International, Dec. 9 10, 1972. IISH SI 43/C6693/27.
arduous year, a visibly exhausted chancellor vowed to focus more heavily on domestic policy.32

**Israel: Another Difficult Year**

By contrast with West Germany, Israel’s diplomacy in 1972 was characterized by mounting problems. In the Middle East, it was dominated by immobilism.33 Meir, fearful of relinquishing her country’s territorial gains without a guarantee of its full security – and leading a cabinet deeply divided over domestic issues and foreign policy – continued to reject outside mediation and the interim proposals promoted by the Soviets and the Arabs that fell short of a full-fledged peace. Israel pursued a strategy of attrition aimed at forcing its adversaries into direct negotiations in which it would insist on altering the 1967 borders.34 Moreover, by 1972 the steady growth of new settlements in the Sinai and West Bank, creating faits accomplis on the ground, had made it even more difficult for Israeli leaders to accept any form of territorial compromise.35

In this US presidential election year, Israel could still count on Washington’s full support to maintain the status quo.36 Not only was there a strong personal rapport between Meir and Nixon, but the president’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger avidly promoted the prolongation of the Middle East status quo in order to eliminate Soviet influence and bring Egypt into Washington’s orbit while he first pursued a settlement in Vietnam.37 On the other hand, after the Moscow summit produced no breakthrough on the Middle East, Sadat’s surprise

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announcement on July 18, 1972, to expel the Soviet mission along with his overtures to Washington, posed a potential threat to Israel’s exclusive ties to the United States.  

Moreover, by 1972 Israel was becoming increasingly isolated in the world community. Its relations with the Soviet bloc remained frozen. Although Moscow increased the numbers of Soviet Jews allowed to leave that year, the prospect of resuming diplomatic relations had been extinguished. One renegade Communist leader seeking outside recognition and support, Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu, promoted a face-to-face meeting between Meir and Sadat that, not unexpectedly, failed to materialize.

Israel’s ties to the two European permanent Security Council members, France and Great Britain were equivocal. Despite its hopes for a thaw with Georges Pompidou and the exertions of its ambassador Asher Ben-Natan, France, with its growing Muslim population, dependence on Arab oil, and ambition to rival the United States in the Mediterranean and Middle East, continued to distance itself from Israel, refusing to lift its arms embargo (while selling 110 Mirage jets to Libya) and declining visits from Eban and Meir. Britain’s Heath government, despite the two countries’ strong economic and personal ties, was alarmed over the dangers of another Middle East war and was moving toward a more “balanced” role in the region. Moreover, in the Socialist


International, where Meir still played an active role (and which supported her efforts to free Soviet Jewry and deplored the terrorist attacks on Israel), the new leadership expressed increasing concern over the Palestinians’ condition and the dim prospects of a Middle East peace.43

There was also friction with the European Economic Community, Israel’s major trading partner, which was now looming larger in world affairs due to its imminent expansion to nine members, its formal recognition by the Soviet Union in March 1972, and its impending participation in the CSCE. Israel faced not only difficult negotiations with Brussels over the renewal of its preferential trade agreement (due to expire in 1975), but also the more immediate threat that Great Britain – a major importer of its citrus and manufactured wood products – would be obliged after its entry to raise its tariffs to EEC levels. Also, with the launching of the EEC’s negotiations over a preferential trade agreement with Egypt, there was the heightened threat of an expansion of the Arab economic boycott against Israel.44

Except for the Netherlands, Israel found little support in Brussels. France vetoed a two-year waiver on British tariffs on Israeli goods; and West Germany, intent on restoring relations with the Arabs, announced its more “open-minded” stance toward Israeli-Arab questions.45 Suddenly France, on the occasion of the EEC’s first expansion, in 1972 launched an ambitious initiative aimed at strengthening the EEC’s economic and political role in North Africa and the Middle East: a proposal to replace its piecemeal arrangements with individual countries with a uniform free trade zone encompassing the entire region, including Israel.46 Eban, who guardedly welcomed the

45 Die Lage im Nahen Osten, Sept 18, 1972, PA AA B30/677.
French scheme, would have greatly preferred more immediate and concrete concessions from Brussels;\textsuperscript{47} and indeed, Israel was to receive a less than evenhanded treatment from Brussels in the ensuing free trade negotiations.\textsuperscript{48}

An unexpected blow came from Africa in 1972 when Idi Amin’s Uganda, followed by Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, and Niger, suddenly broke off diplomatic relations. Within the next year, in the wake of the October 1973 war, the number of defections would swell to twenty-five.\textsuperscript{49} The defeat of Israel’s long, costly efforts to win over Black Africa had several causes, among them the failures of its technical assistance programs and its small amounts of financial aid along with its interventions in internal African disputes and its ties to the reviled South Africa.\textsuperscript{50} The African tilt away from Israel in 1972 was also the result of mounting Arab (especially Libyan) pressure, a rising sentiment of continental solidarity against an “aggressor” state and an occupying power, and the


Africans’ identification with the Palestinians as a kin subjugated people fighting for national liberation.51

Also occurring in 1972, the Arab countries, bolstered by the Soviet bloc, continued their offensive against Israel in the United Nations, which now had a large Third World majority. The principal arena was the Human Rights Commission, which after 1968 had been transformed from a site of Cold War polemics into a tribunal against Israel and South Africa.52 In a major escalation, on March 22 the commission, in a 15–4 vote (with 11 abstentions), adopted a resolution sponsored by Egypt, Lebanon, Tanzania, India, and Pakistan accusing Israel of committing war crimes in the occupied territories.53 Recoiling over this link with the Nuremberg trials, Israel was also stung by France’s vote in favor of the resolution.54 Then on June 26, in a 13–0 vote (with 2 abstentions), the UN Security Council – for the fourth time in two years – adopted a resolution introduced by France condemning Israeli attacks on the Palestinian guerrilla camps in Lebanon in reprisal for the Lod massacre. During the heated three-day debate, Soviet representative Yakov Malik


54 Jerusalem Post, Apr. 18, 1972, Ruete to AA, Paris, Apr. 21, 1972, PA AA B36/542. Guillaud to Jobert, May 15, 1972, AN Pompidou 5 AG 2 1032 The four negative votes came from Guatemala, the Netherlands, the United States, and Zaire, the eleven abstentions from Austria, Ghana, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, the Philippines, and the five Latin American members.

The culmination of this Arab led and Soviet bloc campaign occurred on Nov. 10, 1975, when the UN General Assembly, by a vote of 72 35 (with 32 abstentions) voted to classify Zionism as a form of racism. Howard Tolley, The U.N. Commission on Human Rights (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987), p. 88. (The resolution was repealed Dec. 26, 1991.)
accused Israel’s leaders of committing the same “state crimes” for which the Nazis had been condemned at Nuremberg.  

Israel’s domestic conditions were only slightly less tumultuous. The postwar economic boom continued, and unemployment was at a record low of 2.7 percent but at the cost of rising prices, a 20 percent inflation, and some 260 strikes in industry and the public sector, forcing substantial pay raises and increases in health and welfare benefits at the end of the year. Immigration increased by 34 percent in 1972 to a total of 56,000, including (despite Moscow’s new “diploma tax”) 32,000 Soviet Jews—twice as many as in the previous year—which strained the country’s resources, particularly in housing construction. Israel’s trade deficit, although reduced by 16 percent and balanced by US military and economic aid, West German loans and payments to Holocaust victims, and contributions from the Jewish Diaspora, amounted to $433 million; and despite an 11 percent reduction, its expenditures for defense still consumed 33 percent of the total budget.

Political tensions rose in 1972 in anticipation of the October 1973 parliamentary and local elections. Meir, despite her protestations, was widely expected to run again to avoid a conflict between the two rivals, Allon and Dayan. But her fragile coalition was divided over the future of the occupied territories, while the opposition stood firm against any withdrawal. Moreover, in the summer of 1972 only Meir’s forceful intervention tamped down a bitter conflict between secular and religious cabinet members over civil marriage and conversion and prevented the collapse of her government and an immediate election. Meir also deftly balanced the advocates and opponents of expanding Israel’s military, security, and religious settlements—now numbering forty-four—in the Sinai and Golan Heights and on the West Bank, and in Gaza, issuing


56 Some of Israel’s labor shortage was compensated by the influx of fifty thousand Palestinian workers from the occupied territories. Puttkamer to AA, Apr. 3, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104779, June 29, 1973, BAK B136/3636.

57 Details of the tax imposing a stiff monetary reimbursement for the Jewish emigrants’ higher education in Boris Morozov, ed., *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 166–70.


60 “A Deputy Minister in Israel Is Ousted,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1972; Rückriegel to AA, July 19, 1972, BayHStA StK 16182.
ambiguous statements over their endurance in any future peace arrangements.61

**West Germany and Israel: A Brandt Visit?**

In the wake of the tensions unleashed by the *Kulturwoche*, Israeli-German relations were resumed on a cautious note in 1972. No high-level visits had been scheduled, although in May Albert Osswald, the SPD minister-president of Hesse, paid a ten-day visit to Israel.62 In June, Scheel told a press conference that the FRG had “good” but not “special” relations with Israel.63

Meir took steps to reverse the drift between Bonn and Jerusalem. Overcoming considerable personal and political qualms, on February 6 she bowed to Eban’s proposal and invited Willy Brandt to become the first sitting West German chancellor to pay a visit to Israel.64 It was an audacious gamble, widely considered a spoiling action at a moment when the FRG was absorbed in delicate negotiations with Israel’s Arab opponents.65 But it also expressed more ambitious Israeli aims, among them to increase the possibility of more financial aid, gain additional support within the EEC, obtain an ally in the campaign to free Soviet Jewry, and even establish a counterweight to the Superpowers’ dominance of Middle Eastern affairs.66

Brandt was disconcerted by Meir’s invitation and even more by its unconventional delivery. First announced in the Israeli press a full week before the formal message arrived, the prospective visit stirred outrage and threats in Arab capitals only weeks before the Arab


63 Ben Horin to FM, June 9, 1972, ISA 130 5332/16zn.

64 Meir to Brandt, Feb. 6, 1972, PA AA B36/545. Unlike her mentor, Ben Gurion, who had embraced the new Germany, Meir held strong anti-German sentiments and shrank from assuming an obligation to pay a reciprocal visit to the FRG. Niels Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe: Die deutsch-israelischen Beziehungen in der Ära Konrad Adenauer und David Ben Gurion* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004), pp. 440 1.

65 Redies Aufzeichnung, Feb. 8, 1972, PA AA B36/545.

League’s March 10–11 meeting to lift the diplomatic boycott against the FRG.67

Brandt, who “because of the German past” could not refuse to visit Israel,68 moved quickly to appease both sides. To the Arabs, he announced his intention to postpone the trip until relations with the Arab nations had been “regulated” and only after consultations with Arab leaders.69 And to Israel, while assenting to Meir’s “important initiative,” he asked for a delay until the Eastern Treaties were ratified by the Bundestag.70

On June 27, there was another postponement. Three weeks after the FRG and Egypt resumed diplomatic relations, and on the day of the Security Council’s overwhelming vote against Israel, Brandt and Meir met in Vienna at the Socialist International Congress. In this largely cordial, private exchange, Brandt easily won Meir’s agreement to defer his journey to Israel until after the November 1972 federal elections.71

But in the fall of 1972 the visit was put on ice. Following Brandt’s stunning electoral victory in November, the Israeli government and public still hoped he would come. However, the reigniting of anti-German sentiment after Munich and Zagreb, and the real danger of hostile demonstrations – plus Brandt’s post-election exhaustion – convinced Bonn to drop this difficult prospect for another half year.72

September 5, 1972

The role of host to the 1972 summer Olympics represented a significant honor for the Federal Republic. Despite the immense cost, Germany’s second invitation to lead the Olympics73 symbolized its

69 Redies Runderlass, Feb. 8, 1972, AAPD 1972 1:121, n. 29; Gesprächsaufzeichnung (Brandt Tunisian amb. Mestiri), Feb. 24, 1972, BAK B36/150. In an interview aired on Egyptian television on March 7, Brandt stressed the FRG’s desire to play a positive role in a region whose conditions were closely tied with Europe and also his hope to expand Bonn’s relations with the Arab world with trade and economic exchanges as well as cultural and human ties. AAPD 1972 1:161, n. 4.
70 Brandt to Meir, Mar. 9, 1972, PA AA B36/545.
73 In 1931, the International Olympic Committee had awarded the 1936 summer games to Berlin in recognition of Germany’s peaceful return to the world community after World
people’s remarkable transformation after World War II. Moreover, the selection of Munich enabled the West German Olympic Committee (OC) to display a youthful, thriving middle-sized Bavarian metropolis and dispel that city’s negative past as the birthplace of the NSDAP, the location of the Nazi regime’s first concentration camp in its Dachau suburb, and the site of the 1938 mutilation of Czechoslovakia.74

For Israel, which had participated in every Olympic competition since 1952, the Munich Olympics represented an equally significant opportunity to ease its political isolation and display its flag at the very center of the continent it aspired to join. The Israeli press and public expressed almost no reservations over the locale, although there were a few signs of right-wing disapproval that the Olympics had returned to Germany “too soon.”75

Like the international competitions held in Melbourne in 1956 and in Mexico City in 1968, the Munich Olympics offered a giant stage for political protests before thousands of journalists, hundreds of thousands of spectators, and hundreds of millions of viewers connected by satellite television. Thus the issue of public order would be paramount; but because the West German constitution had assigned security matters to the individual states, the Bavarian government was in charge of the arrangements, with federal officials in a secondary role. Faced with a long list of potential threats from domestic and foreign groups, the OC’s Ordnungsdienst (security force) had enlisted the Munich police, summoned additional officers from other German states, borrowed federal and state security officials, and called for stronger border controls.76

To be sure, the German organizers’ overriding concern was to supplant the police-state atmosphere of the 1936 Olympics with the serenity and democratic values of 1972. These were embodied not only in Munich’s official motto (the “happy games”) and the adorable dachshund mascot “Waldi,” the Olympic stadium’s stunningly transparent Zeltdach (tent

War I, although five years later Adolf Hitler exploited the global spotlight to showcase the Third Reich’s might. David Clay Large, Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936 (New York: Norton, 2007).


75 Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 190–91.

roof), and the city’s rich and varied cultural programs, but also in the absence of barbed-wire atop the two-meter-high chain-link fence encircling the Olympic Village and the two thousand unarmed, pale-blue-uniformed “Oly” patrols. After reviewing dozens of possible threats to the Olympics, the OC had decided against providing any special protection to participants, and Israel had raised no objections to the Germans’ security arrangements.

Several months before the opening of the Olympics, however, three members of the Palestinian group Black September had begun plotting a spectacular action in Munich. This loosely organized faction, named after the September 1970 massacre of Palestinian fighters and refugees by King Hussein’s army and led by Yasser Arafat, had originally focused on attacking Jordanian targets (including the assassination of its prime minister in 1971); but in 1972 Black September had expanded its prey to include West Germany – the February bombing of the Strüver Factory in Hamburg exporting military equipment to Israel; and also Israel – the May hijacking of the Brussels–Tel Aviv flight, and aiding the JRA assassins.

On the night of September 4, eight Black September operatives, led by “Issa” (Lutfif Aatif, twenty-seven years old) and “Tony” (Yussef Nassal, twenty-five), assembled at the Munich central train station to plan the next morning’s action; and at 4:00 a.m. on September 5, after entering the lightly protected Olympic Village armed with eight Kalashnikov rifles and ten grenades, they made their way into the Israeli quarters at 31 Connollystrasse where they shot two men who resisted and seized nine hostages.

77 Details in Large, Munich 1972, pp. 112–27; Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 95-126, 148-56; Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 61. Six months earlier, Munich police chief Manfred Schreiber had dismissed a police psychologist’s detailed model of what would actually happen on Sept. 5; it also appears that the Soviet delegation received extra security.


81 For a résumé of the events of Sept. 5: Matthias Dahlke, Der Anschlag auf Olympia ’72 (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2006), Large, Munich 1972, Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, Simon Reeve, One Day in September (New York: Arcade, 2000).
There were two immediate goals behind Black September’s action, symbolically labeled Operation Ikrit and Biram.\(^{82}\) The most obvious was to publicize the Palestinians’ national demands before a vast world audience and avenge their exclusion from the Olympics;\(^{83}\) the terrorists also aimed at raising Arafat’s stature vis-à-vis his more radical PFLP and Fatah rivals;\(^{84}\) and another may well have been to avenge the death of their two comrades when Israeli commandos had stormed the hijacked Sabena plane that had landed in Lod in May.\(^{85}\)

This rogue Palestinian action also served broader political purposes: It was a rebuke to Egypt and other Arab leaders for currying favor with the West; to Jordan for its lingering designs on the West Bank,\(^{86}\) to Israel for aspiring to permanent control over the Palestinians; and to the Federal Republic for its longtime support of Israel.\(^{87}\) And it is also possible that the attack was aimed at placing the Soviet Union on notice that, unlike its other Arab clients, the Palestinians intended to defy Moscow’s cautious directives.\(^{88}\)

This narrative also draws on the following: (1) the records in the Staatsarchiv Munich (Staatsanwaltschaft 37430/1 14 “Olympiaattentat”) containing transcripts of the interrogations conducted immediately after the events of Sept. 5; (2) Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, Erste Zusammenfassung...5 6 September, Sept. 7, 1972, BayHStA MInn/88552; (3) the joint seventy one page federal/Bavarian Report, Sept. 19, 1972, ibid., St K 17083; and (4) Report by Israeli Mossad chief Zvi Zamir, Sept. 6, trans. into English and sent by Golda Meir to the German government: AdsD WBA A9/22.

\(^{82}\) Named after two Christian villages in the Upper Galilee near the Lebanon border whose inhabitants in October and November 1948 had been pressured by the Israeli occupying forces to evacuate on the promise that they would be allowed to return to their homes, a promise endorsed by Ben Gurion. But when the region was declared a security zone in 1951, the villagers’ homes were destroyed, their properties confiscated and turned over to Israeli settlements, and only the ruins of their churches remained. Although some inhabitants fled to Lebanon, where they were housed in refugee camps, others settled in nearby Arab villages where, as Israeli citizens, they have continued to petition for the restoration of their homes and property. David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), pp. 210-24; “Cabinet Rejects Biram and Ikrit Villagers’ Plea to Return,” *Ha’aretz*, Oct. 10, 2001.


\(^{84}\) Large, *Munich 1972*, p. 198; Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 194-95.

\(^{85}\) Michael Rubner, “Massacre in Munich,” *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 179.


\(^{88}\) On Arafat’s July visit to Moscow, where he was discouraged from armed action against Israel: Seydoux to MAE, Moscow, July 19, 1972, Merillon to MAE, Moscow, Aug. 3,
On September 5, 1972, the city of Munich once more became the center of an international drama. At 5:10 a.m., Issa presented Black September’s two-page ultimatum to the West Germans: They would free the nine hostages in exchange for the release of 234 Palestinians and the surviving JRA attacker Okamoto Kozo held in Israeli prisons, along with the recently captured RAF leaders Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof currently held in a maximum security prison near Stuttgart. They threatened to kill the Israelis if their demands were not met. German officials, shocked and unprepared, hastily assembled a political crisis team of municipal, state, federal, and Olympic officials. The German team won an extension until noon; but by then the Israeli ambassador had arrived, conveying his government’s refusal to release any prisoners.

Now solely responsible for the fate of the nine Israelis, the German team dragged out the negotiations. They enlisted support from local Arab representatives, futilely offered money and substitutes for the hostages, and won three further postponements while attempting (and discarding) two rescue operations. Brandt also sent a personal appeal to Arab leaders, stating that “the whole world expects you to bring your influence to bear immediately [in this crisis].” In the meantime, the drawn-out negotiations in the Olympic Village occurred in a surreal atmosphere.


Large, Munich 1972, pp. 207 10.

Headed by the Munich police chief Manfred Schreiber and consisting of former Munich mayor and vice president of the Organizing Committee, Hans Jochen Vogel; the Bavarian minister of the interior Bruno Merk, federal interior minister Hans Dietrich Genscher (later joined by his security officer, Ulrich K. Wegener), and the head of the German Olympic Committee Willi Daume (who was in almost constant contact with the IOC president Avery Brundage). Reportedly, Walther Tröger, the informal mayor of the Olympic Village, Bavarian minister president Alfons Goppel, the interior minister of North Rhine Westphalia, Willi Weyer, and the CSU leader Franz Josef Strauss also took part in the team’s deliberations. Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 197 99; Dahlke, Anschlag auf Olympia, p. 27, Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 63; Large, Munich 1972, pp. 208 9; Reeve, One Day in September, p. 17. Also a ten member crisis staff at the Auswärtiges Amt, headed by State Secretary Sigismund von Braun, was in constant contact with Munich, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Sept. 8, 1972.

FM to Ben Horin, Sept. 5, 1972 (2 tels.), ISA 130 5334/4. ISA 130/5331, contains transcripts of the phone calls on Sept. 5 6 between Ben Horin and his staff and the foreign ministry in Jerusalem. In one of their telephone conversations, Brandt assured Meir that the Israeli athletes would be freed on German soil and he rejected on West German constitutional grounds the prime minister’s offer to dispatch forces to rescue the hostages. Large, Munich 1972, pp. 215 16.

Details in Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 199 200.

Dahlke, Anschlag auf Olympia, p. 14; also Niemöller to Germ. emb. Tunis, Nov. 5, 1972, AAPD 1972 2:1246, n. 11.
observed by hundreds of television cameras and broadcasters, thousands of armed German police, and tens of thousands of onlookers who had gathered at the perimeter of the Olympic Village.95

The situation changed dramatically at 5:00 p.m. when a fatigued Issa, after several phone calls (including one to a mysterious contact in Tunis), demanded a plane to fly the Palestinians and their hostages to Egypt where the prisoner exchange would occur under less fraught conditions.96 Even after obtaining Meir’s assent, the Germans were in a quandary, fearing to abandon the Israelis (and also endanger their pilots and crew) but also under pressure not to break off the Olympic Games, which – for the first time in

their modern history – had been suspended in the late afternoon until the memorial service the next morning for the two murdered Israeli athletes.\textsuperscript{97}

After the Egyptian government refused Brandt’s plea to assume responsibility for the captive Israelis, the Germans were now backed into a corner.\textsuperscript{98} The crisis team, although acceding to Issa’s terms, had decided to stage an armed rescue mission at the Fürstenfeldbruck Military Airport, located fifteen miles northwest of Munich.\textsuperscript{99} But as the grim procession of masked and heavily armed captors and blindfolded captives exited Connollystrasse en route to the airport, the Germans – along with the newly arrived Mossad chief Zvi Zamir and his Shin Bet colleague Victor Cohen – suddenly discovered a total of \textit{eight} heavily armed Palestinians guarding the nine Israeli athletes.\textsuperscript{100}

Not unexpectedly, the last-minute rescue attempt was a failure. Issa, upon inspecting the empty Lufthansa craft,\textsuperscript{101} recognized the Germans’ deception and rushed back to the helicopters. Ordered by the police chief to fire, the five sharpshooters stationed around the airfield began shooting, wounding two Palestinians and one of the helicopter pilots. But instead of surrendering (as the crisis team had hoped), the Palestinians, taking shelter in the choppers’ shadows, shot back at the control tower, damaging the spotlights (for which no replacement bulbs were available), and blanketing large parts of the field in darkness. During the mêlée, a Bavarian police officer, who was shot in the head, became the sole German casualty.\textsuperscript{102} And despite the presence of scores of armed police, the German team – awaiting the arrival of armored vehicles – refused to storm the airfield, fearing to endanger the helicopter crews and the hostages.\textsuperscript{103}

Suddenly there was an eerie pause. Mounting the roof, Cohen, speaking in Arabic, appealed to the Palestinians to surrender, whereupon they

\textsuperscript{97} Large, \textit{Munich 1972}, pp. 219–20.
\textsuperscript{99} But only after abandoning a plan to overpower Palestinians as they left the building on foot, which miscarried when Issa spotted hidden sharpshooters in the underground garage and insisted that a bus carry them to the helicopter pad five hundred meters behind the Olympic administration building. Reeve, \textit{One Day in September}, pp. 99–100.
\textsuperscript{100} But which Schreiber neglected to inform his team at the airport. Large, \textit{Munich 1972}, pp. 224–25.
\textsuperscript{101} At the last minute, the seventeen police officers, disguised as Lufthansa personnel and fearing for their lives against the armed Palestinians, had abandoned the plane. Ibid., p. 225.
\textsuperscript{102} Police officer Anton Fliegerbauer, who was hit by a stray bullet while observing the shooting from the ground floor of the tower, received a large civic funeral on September 8. Large, \textit{Munich 1972}, pp. 247–48.
\textsuperscript{103} Zamir Report, Sept. 6, ISA archives, \url{http://www.archives.gov.il/chapter/d didnt make even minimal effort save human lives zvi zamirs reports events munich/ document 15} (in Hebrew).
resumed shooting at the tower. Almost an hour later, the four armored vehicles finally arrived at Fürstenfeldbruck, whereupon the surviving Palestinians began systematically shooting the nine bound prisoners and also tossed a grenade into one of the helicopters, consuming it in fire. When the firing ended shortly after midnight, five Palestinians—including Issa and Tony—were dead, and three had been captured. Adding to the grim outcome, were the two contradictory news releases: the first, at around 11:30 a.m. (based on unconfirmed rumors while the gun battle was still raging) reporting that all the hostages had been freed, which stirred worldwide elation; and the second, at 2:30 a.m. on September 6, confirming the deaths of all the Israelis.

There were ample criticisms of the West Germans’ improvised rescue operation, which Zamir bluntly labeled “exceptionally amateurish” (ausgesprochener Dilettantismus). The remote location of Fürstenfeldbruck added to the risks. On a practical level, the airfield was insufficiently lit; there was no radio contact between the command team and the rescuers; and the five sharpshooters were inadequately trained and equipped (without infrared equipment), badly positioned, and reluctant to kill the Palestinians.

There was also a serious leadership gap. Throughout the day, despite the active participation of Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and the almost constant monitoring by Brandt and the Auswärtiges Amt, the federal government had essentially ceded the initiative to the Bavarian Interior Ministry and to police officials lacking experience in military or diplomatic affairs but unready to summon federal or Israeli forces. Pitted against eight highly trained Palestinian guerrillas, the crisis team’s acute concern for West Germany’s self-image and its fatalism toward the captive Israelis contributed to the disaster.

At 10 a.m. on September 6, three thousand athletes and eighty thousand spectators assembled in the Olympic Stadium for the memorial

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104 Large, Munich 1972, pp. 224-28; Reeve, One Day in September, pp. 105-24.
105 Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, p. 201. Reeve, One Day in September, pp. 125-34; Large, Munich 1972, pp. 229-31, faults the German authorities for imposing a lockdown on news coverage at Fürstenfeldbruck.
107 Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, p. 201. The firefighters refused to approach one of the burning helicopters, fearing that one of the fedayeen might be lurking nearby. Large, Munich 1972, p. 228.
109 Once Meir refused the Palestinians’ terms, Schreiber became convinced that the Israelis were doomed. Interview, Der Spiegel 38 (Sept. 11, 1972), p. 32; also Merk: “All we could do was hope for a mistake. But these people were not amateurs.” Daily Telegraph, Sept. 8, 1972.
service, which was also broadcast throughout the world. Two of the five speakers created shockwaves: Gustav Heinemann, who, defying Scheel’s warning, satisfied the Israelis and infuriated the Arabs not only by condemning Black September as a “criminal organization” but also by chastising “those countries that had failed to prevent its actions.” And IOC president Avery Brundage who, despite pleas from all sides and the withdrawal of the Israeli delegation and of athletes from several other teams, announced, “The Games must go on.”

World leaders condemned the Palestinians’ attack on the Israeli team and their violation of the Olympic Truce. Nixon, who had kept abreast of the crisis, described the guerrillas as “international outlaws” and announced the creation of a cabinet-level antiterrorism team; British prime minister Heath called it an “insane assault,” and French foreign minister Maurice Schumann expressed his indignation over the “use of a sports event . . . for criminal gains.” Even Moscow deplored the attack, followed by the Communist governments of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. And although Egypt and Tunisia were silent, Jordan’s King Hussein—the bête noire of Black September—called the killers “morally sick.”

In the wake of the debacle, Brandt’s government faced daunting challenges. Although it was not the first foreign-terrorist attack on German soil (there had been eight since September 1969), this was the first time the FRG had responded not as the principal target but as a middleman placed between the assailants and their victims and in the full glare of an international spotlight. While the national press immediately criticized

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111 New York Times, Sept. 7, 1972; Large, Munich 1972, pp. 243–45, for a critique of Brundage’s tactlessness in equating the murder of the Israeli athletes with the earlier exclusion of the Rhodesian team (“two savage attacks”) from the Munich Olympics. The IOC’s decision was and is still contested between those who believe(d) it was correct to deny the terrorists a victory by halting the Olympics and those who believe(d) it improper to continue after the massacre of the Israelis. Probably the most influential vote at the time came from Washington, DC, where the Nixon administration although sensitive to the political backlash in an election year refused Meir’s plea to call for the cancellation of the Olympics. Details in Large, Munich 1972, pp. 239–40.

112 “Leaders around the World Express Horror at the Guerrilla Attack at Olympics,” New York Times, Sept. 6, 1972; DPA [Deutsche Presse Agentur], Sept. 6, 1972, in BayHStA StK 17083. The Bureau of the Socialist International also condemned the attack, as did the Vatican and the UN secretary general. The one dissenting voice came from Ugandan present Idi Amin, who in a message to Kurt Waldheim praised Hitler’s murder of six million Jews and insisted that Germany was “the right place” for the Palestinians’ attack on the Israelis. New York Times, Sept. 13, 1972, p. 4.

its unpreparedness and “bungling,” foreign critics also questioned Bonn’s self-characterization as the victim of a ruthless and meticulously planned plot and its assigning major responsibility to Israeli intransigence and the Arabs’ refusal to cooperate.

The government weighed the domestic consequences. Brandt, who was about to call new federal elections in order to break the current parliamentary deadlock and fearing that the opposition would exploit the debacle, raised hackles in CSU-led Bavaria with his call for a “frank” and “ruthless” federal/Land inquiry; but rather than appointing an independent national or international commission, the chancellor deputized the very officials who had been responsible on September 5.

A more important decision was to fill the security gap. Within days after Munich, Genscher set plans in motion for the creation of a federal counterterrorism unit GSG (Grenzschutzgruppe) 9, modeled on Sayeret Matkal, the special forces unit of the Israel Defense Forces. However, because of the Nazi past and the constitutional ban on a national police force, the new organization would consist of specially trained volunteers from federal police units – rather than the country’s military forces – prepared to support the Länder police and also to operate outside the country.

Bonn also moved swiftly to allay the public’s fears of further terrorism. It immediately provided special protection for West...
German Jews, who were threatened with further violence. And, responding to widespread anti-Arab sentiment, Bonn tightened border controls and expanded restrictions on Arab visitors and immigrants. Most controversially, it ordered the Länder to round up and deport all foreigners living illegally in Germany, and in early October it outlawed the Palestinian Workers’ Union (GUPA) and the Palestinian Student Association (GUPS). Not unexpectedly, these measures provoked left-wing demonstrations, drew questions from the press, and stirred outrage in the Arab world. But while critics deplored the Brandt government’s “ballooning” executive power and assault on the Rechtsstaat, its supporters championed the liberal state’s obligation to ensure freedom by combating violence and terror.

On the diplomatic front, Brandt had a full agenda, including high-level talks at Munich with Pompidou and Kissinger as well as the current negotiations for a basic treaty with the GDR, which would be crucial for his reelection. But the trauma of Munich also spurred the Bonn government into a new diplomatic direction: a search for international solutions to global terrorism. On September 12, at the EEC foreign ministers’ meeting in Rome, Scheel urged his partners to support Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim’s proposal to the General Assembly

On September 5, 1972
to discuss the prevention of international terrorism. And because all of Western Europe was now at risk, Scheel also proposed that the Nine begin coordinating their intelligence-gathering activities and forging other forms of anti-terrorist collaboration.

But Bonn’s most urgent diplomatic task – with its “every statement [coming] under intense scrutiny” was to propitiate the Arabs and Israel, and both publics were highly incensed. The Arab press condemned the Germans’ “deceit” of the Palestinians, Heinemann’s censure of their governments, and Bonn’s radical anti-Arab measures, and it compared Brandt’s Germany with the Third Reich. Moreover, there were hostile demonstrations throughout the Middle East. Israeli journalists, probing the failed rescue at Fürstenfeldbruck, questioned the Germans’ commitment to save Jewish lives. The West German embassy in Tel Aviv became the target of threatening phone calls, demonstrations, and bomb threats, forcing Puttkamer to request special protection, including a bodyguard.

Brandt, downplaying his compatriots’ outrage over the Arabs’ refusal to condemn Black September, set to work patching up Bonn’s newly established relations with the Arab League. Both he and Scheel distanced themselves from Heinemann’s scolding words, insisting on a “differentiated” stance toward friendly and hostile governments. The chancellor’s task was facilitated by the restrained stance of the Egyptian and Tunisian presidents, who refused the Palestinians’ demand to break their ties with Bonn.

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128 Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, p. 208.


130 See, esp., articles by Ya’akov Erez, in Ma’ariv, Sept. 6, 1972, Aharon Lahav in Davar, Sept. 7, 1972; also Puttkamer to AA, Sept. 6, 1972, PA AA B36/506.


132 Especially after reports of their representation at the elaborate “heroes’ funeral” held in Tripoli on Sept. 13 for the five slain Palestinians whose bodies had been flown from Munich two days earlier. Washington Post, Sept. 17, 1972; Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, pp. 210 11.


134 See, esp., Steltzer to AA, Cairo, Sept. 7, 1972, Naupert to Frank, Tunis, Sept. 9, 12, 1972, AAPD 1972 2:1193 96, 1231 34, 1245, n. 8. On the delicate issue of Tunisia’s
The Brandt government also reached out to Jerusalem. On the morning of September 6, the chancellor phoned Meir, and he and Heinemann sent condolence telegrams as well; two days later, they also sent messages at the start of the Jewish New Year. And on September 11, without a formal acknowledgment of its responsibility, the Brandt government announced the establishment of a DM 3.2 million fund to pay an immediate compensation to the victims’ families, which would be distributed through the German Red Cross.

Meir’s initial response was restrained: She thanked the chancellor for his government’s efforts to rescue the Israeli athletes and sent her condolences to the family of the German victim. And from the Israeli embassy in Bonn came an urgent plea from Yitzhak Ben-Ari to withhold criticism at a precarious political moment for Brandt and Genscher.

But public outrage quickly forced Meir to alter her moderate stance, especially after Bonn appeared to be downplaying the tragedy and spending its main efforts pacifying the Arabs. Responding to charges of major security lapses (which she had already acknowledged), Meir appointed a three-member committee to examine both countries’ intelligence errors. Moreover, Meir, who had staunchly defended her reliance on the Germans to protect the hostages, was shaken by the highly critical eyewitness accounts presented to the cabinet on September 11 by Zamir and Ben-Horin. On September 19, the Israeli government and press exploded in outrage when the joint report prepared by federal and Bavarian officials completely absolved the connection with Black September: MacKenzie to FCO, Tunis, Sept. 24, 27, Nov. 26, 1972, GB NA FCO 17/1741.

136 Cabinet meeting, Sept. 6, 1972, http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0/k/k1972 k/kap1 1/kap2 35/para3 1.html?highlight=true&search=israel&stemming= true&field=all#highlightedTerm.
137 Meir to Brandt, Sept. 6, 1972, ISA 130 5334/4; also article by Yosef Harif in *Ma’ariv*, Sept. 6, 1972.
138 Ben Ari to Eban and Zamir, Sept. 10, 1972, ISA 130 5334/4.
139 Schiller and Young, *Munich Olympics*, pp. 300 2, on the ensuing controversy between the victims’ families and the Bonn and Bavarian governments over the Germans’ culpability and negligence and the Israeli athletes’ death. “Ankie Spitzer’s 40 Year Crusade for Olympic Justice,” *Times of Israel*, July 13, 2012.
140 Schiller and Young, *Munich Olympics*, pp. 211 12.
141 Puttkamer to AA, Tel Aviv, Sept. 12, 1972, AAPD 1972 2:1243, n. 2.
German rescuers from responsibility for the athletes’ deaths and underlined the Israelis’ refusal to negotiate.\textsuperscript{142}

Brandt, discomfited by the harsh tone from Jerusalem, fended off Meir’s plea to punish Arab governments for their refusal to disown Black September, emphasizing his government’s delicate position before the trial of the three captured Palestinians.\textsuperscript{143} But in view of the impending West German elections, he also warned the Israeli prime minister to avoid airing their differences in public (which “would not be in the interest of the Israeli or the German side”\textsuperscript{144}).

Although ostensibly agreeing not to make the chancellor’s life “more difficult,” Meir on October 16 devoted the bulk of her forty-five-minute address before the Knesset to the events at Munich. Referring to the secret Israeli investigation, she announced the dismissal of three high-level intelligence officials, but she also lambasted West Germany for its negligence in protecting the Israeli athletes. And while repeating her gratitude for the Germans’ unprecedented armed action on behalf of the Israeli captives, she noted that “from an operational standpoint, there [was] indeed room for thought and a critical attitude.”\textsuperscript{145}

In this speech Meir also addressed Israel’s six-week, air and land campaign against Palestinian bases in Lebanon and Syria, which had abruptly ended the Middle East’s two-year truce. On September 8, without consulting Washington, Meir, bowing to the hawks in her cabinet and an inflamed Israeli public, had launched air attacks against PLO bases in Syria and Lebanon, followed by a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Two days later, the Security Council – paralyzed by Soviet and US vetoes – condemned neither the Palestinian attack at Munich nor the Israeli retaliation against its neighbors.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{142} Puttkamer to AA, Sept. 22, 26, 1972, PA AA B1/509; text of the report in BayHStA St K 17083, published in Bundesrepublik Deutschland/Bundesregierung Bayern, \textit{Die Überfall auf die israelische Olympiamannschaft: Dokumentation} (Bonn: Bundesdruckerei, 1972). The report incorporated the similar conclusion of the Bundestag’s Internal Affairs Committee’s investigation, which had decided against calling for a parliamentary inquiry that would have affected the forthcoming election. Ben Horin to FM, Sept. 19, 1972, ISA 130 5331/11. Among the report’s findings was confirmation that all the Israelis had died from Palestinian bullets.

\textsuperscript{143} Brandt/Ben Horin meeting, Sept. 13, 1972, AdsD WBA A9/25.

\textsuperscript{144} Puttkamer to AA, Oct. 13, 1972, AAPD 1972 2:1534 37 (here 1534 35).


Aside from assuaging the irate public, Israel’s military campaign achieved minimal success. Few Palestinian guerrillas were captured, and the mounting civilian casualties in Lebanon fed the Arabs’ anti-Israel propaganda and quickly diminished the world’s sympathy over the murders at Munich.\(^{147}\) Moreover, Black September’s retaliation against Israeli targets abroad sharply increased the country’s vulnerability, restraining its officials’ and citizens’ foreign travel and forcing their hosts to provide exceptional security measures.\(^{148}\)

Conversely, Israel, with US support, intensified its accusations against the Arab governments for their complicity in Palestinian terrorism. Consequently, while calling for a heightened international effort to combat terrorism, Eban announced that the already-stalled Middle East peace negotiations would not be able to proceed “until this obstacle is out of the way.”\(^{149}\) Paradoxically, this represented a victory for the PLO, which had hitherto been ignored in the UN and Superpower initiatives.

**Zagreb**

There was little surprise over the events on October 29, 1972, although some significant details remain obscure to this day.\(^{150}\) For almost two months, the FRG’s intelligence services and Bavarian justice officials had expected another terrorist strike to free the three Palestinian prisoners; but once again, the two governments were unprepared and their response, on the eve of the federal elections, roiled domestic and international politics.\(^{151}\)

Early on that Sunday morning, Lufthansa flight 615, en route to Frankfurt with a crew of seven, left Damascus and stopped in Beirut where thirteen passengers boarded. Among them were two armed Palestinian commandos,\(^{152}\) who shortly after takeoff threatened to blow up the craft unless the three captives were released. After refueling in Cyprus and passing directly over Zagreb, before noon the hijacked plane arrived in Munich and circled the fog-laden city for almost two hours while the West German


\(^{150}\) Dahlke, *Demokratischer Staat*, p. 72.

\(^{151}\) Details in Schiller and Young, *1972 Munich Olympics*, p. 219; Dahlke, *Anschlag auf Olympia*, p. 20.

government, failing to obtain help from the Arab League (but also ignoring Israeli ambassador Ben-Horin’s pleas) ordered the Bavarian authorities to free the Palestinians and transport them by helicopter to the Riem airport.¹⁵³

This contentious German decision set off another international drama. Just as the three Palestinians arrived at Riem, the hijack leader commanded the Lufthansa pilot to return to Zagreb, announcing that the plane and passengers would be released only after the Palestinians were flown to the Croatian capital. Now the hostages’ fate also depended on the Communist leader Josip Broz Tito, who – although an avowed enemy of terrorism – greatly valued his prestige in the Arab world.¹⁵⁴

The drama intensified when the crisis teams in Munich and Bonn,¹⁵⁵ attempting to obtain the hijackers’ guarantee of an exchange (and also to gain Yugoslav assistance in liberating the hostages), delayed the departure of the three fedayeen, seated in a Condor aircraft with Lufthansa CEO Herbert Culmann and two plain-clothes Bavarian police officers. In the meantime, the captain of the hijacked plane – circling Zagreb and now running out of fuel – sent an urgent appeal to Munich.¹⁵⁶ Thereupon, Culmann, defying his government’s directive,¹⁵⁷ ordered the plane’s departure, arriving in Zagreb at 5:05 p.m.¹⁵⁸

However, there was no prisoner/hostage exchange in Yugoslavia. Before agreeing to land, the hijackers demanded the unconditional release of the three fedayeen, and after arriving in Zagreb, they insisted that the plane be refueled for an immediate departure to Tripoli, threatening to blow up the Lufthansa aircraft. After the German Condor pilot surrendered the three prisoners, Croatia’s interior

¹⁵³ Large, Munich 1972, p. 292; Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 71. Philipp Held, the Bavarian minister of justice, ordered the lifting of the arrest warrant and issued official emigration papers for the three.
¹⁵⁴ Jaenicke to AA, Belgrade, Nov. 2, 1972, AAPD 1972 3:1635 38. It is not clear whether the commandos’ order was due to weather conditions or to avoid another armed confrontation on German soil, or if the Zagreb exchange had been decided in advance.
¹⁵⁵ In Munich consisting of Mayor Georg Kronawitter, Police Chief Manfred Schreiber, and Interior Minister Bruno Merk; in Bonn of Brandt Scheel, Genscher, and Transportation Minister Lauritz Lauritzen.
¹⁵⁶ Details in Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 72; also Andrees Eltern and Jürgen Scherzer, “Gleich fliegen wir alle in die Luft,” Stern 25, no. 47 (Nov. 12, 1972), pp. 18 24, 260 67, reporting the testimony of Lufthansa pilot Walter Claussen.
¹⁵⁷ He was later exonerated for his insubordination. Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 73, n. 212.
¹⁵⁸ See Cullman Interview, Der Spiegel 46 (Nov. 6, 1972), pp. 90 97. At the last minute a Bavarian justice ministry official, expected to fly to Zagreb with the prisoners and negotiate with the hijackers, had been ordered by a superior not to board the plane. Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 72.
minister (on orders from Tito) and with the assent of the West German consul general (who had no time to consult either Munich or Bonn) agreed to refuel. Within minutes, the Boeing 727 departed for Tripoli, where the freed Palestinians were given a heroes’ welcome; and after spending the night as guests of Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the twenty hostages and the plane returned to West Germany.

Once more, the FRG had displayed its incompetence in the public glare. Again, under time pressure, there had been hasty decisions as well as poor communication, deficient coordination between federal and Land officials, and serious diplomatic shortcomings. At home, the CDU/CSU labeled the Brandt government a “feeble guardian of law and order”; and abroad, Bonn’s allies — especially the United States, criticized its “capitulation to terrorism.”

The Brandt government responded forcefully. Its spokesperson Conrad Ahlers informed the press on October 29 that the FRG bore no responsibility for the Arab-Israeli conflict but had now become its “victim.” A day later Scheel repeated these sentiments, reminding the Bundestag’s Internal Affairs Committee that Israel had also conducted a prisoner exchange in 1968. And in the cabinet meeting on October 31 Brandt insisted on the priority of saving human lives and maintained that the FRG was “not in a state of war.”

Furious over these explanations, Israel launched formal protests in Bonn and with the West German ambassador in Tel Aviv. In its message to the UN, Israel rebuked the FRG’s “shocking release” of the

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161 Among these were the AA’s inability to convince Belgrade not to release the hostages and to substitute an Arab plane for the Lufthansa craft. AAPD 1972 3:1637, n. 9; Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, pp. 74 75.


165 Dahlke, Demokratischer Staat, p. 112.


Palestinian prisoners.\textsuperscript{168} The Knesset debate on October 31 exploded with anti-German sentiments;\textsuperscript{169} and the cabinet, upon hearing the report of the recalled Ben-Horin, declared its “confusion, consternation, anger, and indignation.”\textsuperscript{170} Once more, Puttkamer became the target of hostile demonstrations and even death threats.\textsuperscript{171}

The Israeli press was alive with accusations, claiming there were alternatives to surrender and accusing the FRG of sabotaging the global battle against terrorism, especially after the three released Palestinians announced that “they intended to continue their work.”\textsuperscript{172} Israelis debated ways of punishing Bonn – from returning the compensation paid to the athletes’ families to imposing sanctions, to cancelling Brandt’s visit.\textsuperscript{173} Journalists and politicians also voiced suspicions – still held to this day – of a plot between the FRG and the hijackers to get rid of an unwanted problem.\textsuperscript{174} Moreover, for the first time in its history, the...
Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland entered the fray, lodging protests with the federal and Bavarian governments, suggesting that the FRG’s $5 million ransom to the hijackers in February was helping to finance Palestinian terrorism, and declaring their new sense of insecurity.  

With only two weeks left before the federal elections, Brandt sent a carefully crafted message to Meir, which was delivered verbally by Puttkamer on November 8. Without responding directly to the Israelis’ accusations and expressing indignation over their harsh criticisms – especially those comparing him with Hitler – Brandt repeated his commitment to combating terrorism and to maintaining their bilateral relations.  

Yet despite this hopeful signal (which facilitated Ben-Horin’s return to Bonn), neither side had, in fact, accepted the other’s perspective. In an exceptionally sharp exchange on November 15, AA State Secretary Paul Frank defended the FRG’s neutrality in the Middle East conflict and its work to “internationalize” the terrorist problem while Ben-Horin futilely sought a German pledge to fight on Israel’s side.  

Both sides headed in separate directions. Brandt, after his stunning victory in November, intended to focus on ameliorating conditions at home and preparing for the FRG’s entry into the United Nations the next year. In line with this latter goal, the Auswärtiges Amt moved quickly to repair Bonn’s frayed relations with the Arab world, manifested by its restrained stance toward Libya on the question of extraditing the Palestinians.

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175 Van Dam to Brandt and to Bavarian minister president Alfons Goppel, Oct. 31, 1972, ZEJD B. 1/7/179.


177 Washington Post, Nov. 9, 1972, p. 30; Huré to MAE, Tel Aviv, Nov. 9, 1972, FMAE Europe/RFA 1971 76 Z2993; Church to FCO, Tel Aviv, Nov. 9, 1972, GB NA FCO 17/1741.

178 Niemöller Aufzeichnung, Nov. 15, 1972, PA AA B36/544; also Redies Aufzeichnung, Nov. 14, 1972, ibid. The Israeli ambassador’s statements that night on West German television concerning bilateral collaboration forced the AA to mollify the Arabs and counsel restraint on Ben Horin. Redies Aufzeichnung, Nov. 16, 1972, ibid.; Schiller and Young, 1972 Munich Olympics, p. 217.


But on the threat of terrorism, Bonn took a firm stance, underlining its neutrality toward the Middle East conflict but also warning Arab governments against the extension of violence to German soil.\footnote{Dahlke, \textit{Anschlag auf Olympia}, pp. 80 81.} And while strengthening its own security forces, it also intended to work closely with the enlarged EEC and with the UN.\footnote{Redies \textit{Aufzeichnungen}, Nov. 16, 27, 1972, Redies to Rückriegel, Dec. 11, 1972, PA AA B36/544; Redies to Germ. emb. Libya, Dec. 11, 1972, AAPD 1972 3:1794 95.} Refuting Israeli claims of its special ties with the FRG, Scheel’s reportedly announced that Israel could not force the Social-Liberal government – which, he once more maintained, had no members with a Nazi past – to do something that was “not in West Germany’s interest.”\footnote{\textit{American Israelite}, Nov. 30, 1972, p. 20. Scheel had expressed similar sentiments in his Oct. 30 briefing to the Bundestag’s Internal Affairs Committee, Dahlke, \textit{Anschlag auf Olympia}, p. 69.}  

Israel now faced a world newly alerted to the Palestinians’ national claims, represented by the PLO, whose 1968 charter challenged its existence, whose leader had approved the Munich operation, and whose adherents were committed to a global struggle. Without allies to oppose these claims, Israeli leaders opted for armed reprisals: One day after the Zagreb handover, the Israeli air force conducted heavy raids on guerrilla installations in Syria. Another result was to accelerate the launch of the secret and still controversial operation “Wrath of God,” the targeted killings devised by Zamir and Aharon Yariv (former head of Israeli military intelligence) and approved by Meir on September 15 to track down and assassinate Black September operatives responsible for Munich, to prevent a recurrence, and to deter others from joining or assisting Palestinian terrorist organizations.\footnote{Reeve, \textit{One Day in September}, pp. 160 254, Large, \textit{Munich 1972}, pp. 296 98; Rubner, “Massacre in Munich,” pp. 176 78, 180 84; see also George Jonas, \textit{Vengeance: The True Story of an Israeli Counter Terrorism Team} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005); Klein, \textit{Striking Back}; Ronan Bergman, \textit{Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel’s Targeted Assassinations}, trans. Ronnie Hope (New York: Random House, 2018).}

Despite its bungling performances at Munich and Zagreb, the FRG emerged at the end of 1972 with an even stronger focus on its national priorities as well as on its European and global future. Israel, on the other hand, faced the exposure of its vulnerability and its near isolation against a ruthless and resolute enemy. One side’s pragmatism and the other side’s militancy had further widened the gap between the two countries as the baleful German-Jewish past continued to recede.
Our policy has [necessitated] the painful abandonment of illusions and the willingness to break free of restrictive taboos. We had to face reality, if we wanted to change it.¹

Israel’s problem, however, is that it ultimately stands alone.²

The final day of Brandt’s visit to Israel was almost his last. On Monday morning, June 11, 1973, at 9:30 a.m., the chancellor and his party departed Jerusalem for Masada, the Herodian fortress where, according to the testimony of Josephus Flavius, Jewish rebels in 73 CE had committed mass suicide to avoid captivity by the Romans, and which had become a major part of Israel’s national identity.³ But as Brandt’s helicopter attempted to land on the craggy plateau some 450 meters above the Dead Sea and the pilot cut the engine, a sudden gust of wind produced a hard jolt stirring clouds of sand and dust. The chancellor prepared to exit, but when the chopper continued to move he was restrained by Israeli and German security personnel. (The three passengers who leaped from the moving craft were slightly injured and treated at the scene.)

³ Beginning in 1956, Dayan had ordered the Israeli army to conduct its swearing in ceremony at Masada to symbolize the Jews’ ancient ties with the land and their will to survive (expressed by the slogan “Masada shall not fall again”). Between 1963 and 1965, Yigael Yadin, the former IDF chief of staff, had led an extensive, largely foreign funded excavation project at Masada, and published an heroic narrative that strayed significantly from Josephus’s account. Yigael Yadin, Masada: Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

Before a stunned audience of journalists who had been waiting up to four hours in a blazing sun, the helicopter rolled some thirty meters toward the rim of the cliff, while Israeli soldiers attempted to stop the chopper. In the meantime, the pilot, who had restarted the engine, steered the craft sideways until it hit an old stone wall, halting only three meters from the precipice.4

Pulled from the crippled machine, Brandt slipped, recovered his balance, and immediately regained his composure. Thereupon, under the guidance of Yigael Yadin he made a ninety-minute tour of Masada; and when he and his party prepared to descend by cable car, Brandt chided the agitated journalists: “What accident? In this country, one can still expect miracles.”5

Nonetheless – and much to the embarrassment of his hosts – the danger Brandt had faced made headlines throughout the world.6

Foreword

Scholars have long recognized 1973 as a pivotal year marked by the fourth Middle East war and renewed Superpower confrontation and also by the October oil crisis, which shattered the post-1945 Western-dominated economic order and shaped the anarchic globalized environment of the rest of the twentieth century.7 Moreover, because many of the sources of economic and political instability were already in evidence, observers that year had become alert to the momentous changes occurring in their region and throughout the world.


6 Ten days later, recalling the incident with Pompidou, Brandt, dismissed Asher Ben Natan’s (the Israeli ambassador to France) fanciful response to accusations of his government’s negligence that it had been “a French helicopter plus an Arab wind . . . [but] fortunately . . . a great Jewish god!” joking back that it had been a US made craft, a wind off the Mediterranean, and he would not take up the issue of God. Brandt, Begegnungen und Einsichten, p. 597; but Wilke, in his memoir, Mein Jahre, p. 143, cited an Israeli poem: that the “ghosts of murdered Jews” had stirred this gust to frighten the Germans.

Threats to Superpower Détente

Shortly after his second inauguration on January 20 and the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam one week later, Richard Nixon suddenly became a beleaguered leader, plagued not only by the Watergate investigation and the dollar crisis – which almost immediately triggered the oil producers’ demands for higher prices and raised panic among the Western industrialized powers – but also by his administration’s increasingly strained relations with Western Europe over its unilateral dealings with the USSR. Moreover, following Nixon’s striking expansion of presidential power during his first term in office and his landslide victory in November, the US Congress suddenly asserted itself not only with the prospect of the televised Senate Watergate hearings but also with legislation curbing further US military involvement in Southeast Asia and limiting presidential war powers as well.

In addition, there was a direct attack on détente itself. Responding to Moscow’s imposition in August 1972 of a diploma tax on Soviet Jews applying to emigrate, Senator Henry F. Jackson and Congressman Charles Vanik teamed up in February with an amendment to the administration’s Trade Reform Act denying most-favored-nation tariff treatment, credits, and investment and credit guarantees to governments that violated a universal human right – “the right to leave” – thus threatening to cancel one of the Soviets’ major gains from détente.

Nonetheless Leonid Brezhnev was still determined to pursue détente, even with a weakened US president. Fearing the territorial ambitions of a nuclear-armed China, the Soviet leader pressed his colleagues on the urgency of continuing to work with Washington to diminish the tensions and the arms race between the two Superpowers and also to avert a US-Chinese alignment. Thus, in March, fearing to jeopardize the upcoming summit in Washington, the Soviet general secretary ordered the suspension (but not the repeal) of the diploma tax, which, between August 1972

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8 Nixon’s woes were compounded by a toxic relationship with the American press: see, esp., “USA: Nixon gängelt die Presse,” Der Spiegel 11 (Mar. 12, 1973), pp. 80–84.
10 According to Brandt (who conveyed this information to the Israeli ambassador, who relayed it to Meir), the Soviet general secretary refused to recognize the constitutional issues surrounding Watergate but viewed it as a “plot of certain circles in America working against détente.” Ben Horin to FM, May 25, 1973, ISA 130 6808/4m. See also Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp. 270–71.
and February 1973, had raised some 6 million rubles from Jewish emigrants.  

Like Nixon, Brezhnev faced domestic critics of his courting the capitalist enemy; but, invoking the old Leninist policy of peaceful coexistence, he insisted that détente was an “absolute necessity” to enable the USSR to reap economic benefits – among them the development of the oil and gas fields of Siberia, the acquisition of advanced Western technology, and the expansion of East-West trade – along with winning the West’s acknowledgment of the post-1945 borders at the upcoming CSCE – all of which would benefit Soviet citizens and also bolster his leadership.

By most measures, the eight-day Superpower summit in June 1973 was a striking success. The first Soviet leader to visit the United States since 1959, Brezhnev was hosted at the White House, Camp David, and Nixon’s private residence in San Clemente, California, and the two signed nine separate agreements on a host of important issues, including the prevention of nuclear war, a mutual reduction of forces in Europe, and preparations for the CSCE process, which opened in July in Helsinki.

However, on one pressing issue – joint action to prevent a new war in the Middle East – there was conspicuously no accord. After the Vietnam agreement was concluded, Brezhnev on January 30 had sent a clear signal to Washington on the urgency of continuing to work together to bring peace to the Middle East; and immediately afterward, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, under intense domestic and Arab pressure, had


launched another diplomatic initiative to force an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and to gain international recognition of the rights of the Palestinians, which Moscow had dutifully supported. But after the failure of Egypt’s appeal to the Security Council in June, Brezhnev had good reason to fear a new war that would place the Superpowers on opposite sides and destroy détente. Moreover, the Soviet leader’s apprehensions were widely shared; America’s European allies, and especially the FRG, were terrified of a Superpower conflict and of an even more punishing Arab oil boycott than in 1967.

By late June, however, Nixon was deeply enmeshed in Watergate. Despite his earlier pledges to tackle the Middle East problem after the US elections and a Vietnam agreement, he was unready to do so. Moreover, the president was backed by his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who insisted that no progress could be made until after Israel’s October 30 elections. Also, Kissinger had no intention of enhancing Brezhnev’s role in the Arab world or including the Soviets in a future Middle East settlement.

Consequently, despite Brezhnev’s last-minute plea during an unscheduled, almost four-hour nighttime meeting at the end of his US visit, the final communiqué simply acknowledged their differences and contained the anodyne statement that “both parties agreed to continue to exert their efforts to promote the quickest possible settlement in the Middle East.”


19 The text read: “The parties expressed their deep concern with the situation in the Middle East and exchanged opinions regarding ways of reaching a Middle East settlement. Each of the parties set forth its position on this problem. Both parties agreed to continue their efforts to promote the quickest possible settlement in the Middle East. This settlement should be in accordance with the interests of all states in the area, be consistent with their independence and sovereignty and should take into due account the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people.” Joint US USSR Communiqué, June 24, 1973, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/summit/archive/com1973_1.htm. Israel’s “relieved” response: Puttkamer to AA, June 29, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104765.

On the late night Nixon Brezhnev meeting: Memorandum for the President’s File by the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), San Clemente, June 23, 1973, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v15/d132.
True, Brezhnev had succeeded in inserting the first-ever Superpower acknowledgment of the “legitimate interests of the Palestinian people.” But the Soviet leader’s failure to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with Washington left him vulnerable to fierce Arab criticism, and it also made the prospect of war more likely.20

The FRG: After Brandt’s November Triumph

Willy Brandt’s government declaration on January 18, 1973, was a long, carefully worded address, replete with optimism: “Never before,” he announced, “has a German state lived in such good harmony with the free spirit of its citizenry, with its neighbors, and its international partners.” Having accomplished the major part of his Ostpolitik – and now with a comfortable forty-six-seat parliamentary majority – the chancellor promised to focus on domestic problems but without providing details. Brandt pledged his firm commitment to his West European and US allies. In his brief reference to one of the world’s foremost trouble spots, the Middle East, he evoked the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Third Reich as the core of the FRG’s responsibility for Israel’s survival. He nonetheless also noted the Arabs’ growing “understanding of our position,” Bonn’s recognition of their problems, and the Federal Republic’s intention to cultivate friendly relations with all the Arab peoples.21

The SPD-FDP government set to work on combating inflation, preparing legislation on tax reform, improving working-class conditions, and curbing land speculation. At the same time, it had to cope with effects of the international monetary crisis: On the first day of March, $2.7 billion flowed into West Germany, which was twice forced to revalue the mark. Although the government’s hard decisions disadvantaged some West German export industries (especially automobiles), they also bolstered


the Bundesbank’s efforts to create domestic price stability and strengthened Bonn’s stature in international monetary circles.22

There was also a political challenge to Brandt’s leadership. Some 25 percent of the SPD’s newly elected Bundestag deputies belonged to the Jungsozialisten (Jusos), a group of articulate and ambitious left-wing politicians under thirty-five years of age, who had taken the reins of local party cells and now called for a more ideologically driven party. At their annual national congress in early March, the Jusos adopted a radical domestic program demanding state control over German banks and industry that raised objections from the SPD rank and file and from Brandt’s FDP partners. The Jusos also called for a revamping of Bonn’s foreign policy that included the removal of US troops from Europe, cancellation of Brandt’s visit to Israel, and provision of greater support to the Palestinians, stirring alarm among the FRG’s allies, and, especially, in Israel.23

To be sure, aside from airing their goals as “the party of the 1980s,” the Jusos’s leaders were unprepared to overthrow the popular chancellor and sabotage his program.24 Nonetheless, Brandt was forced to respond. Taking time off from his hectic diplomatic schedule, on April 11, in a masterful two-hour address to the SPD congress in Hanover Brandt defended the reformist 1959 Bad Godesberg principles that had enabled the party to win its greatest electoral victory in November; but as a former revolutionary, he was also reluctant to suppress the voices of German youth.25 Although Brandt was overwhelmingly reelected party chairman and the party endorsed his center-left domestic and foreign policies, in the executive committee vote three venerable SPD figures were surprisingly defeated and the well-disciplined Jusos secured ten of the thirty-two seats, bringing a more destabilizing mix into the ruling party’s governing body.26


In foreign affairs, the FRG’s first priority was to deal with the Arabs in order to mitigate the fallout from Munich and Zagreb. To prevent new attacks on West German soil, Bonn sent emissaries to Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt requesting intelligence collaboration and other forms of assistance.\(^{27}\) The Brandt government also reached out directly to the Palestinian leadership. On December 29, 1972, and January 3, 1973, AA official Helmut Redies held talks with the PLO functionary and GUPA leader Abdallah Frangi, who had fled the FRG after Munich to escape arrest and was prepared to offer a “truce.”\(^{28}\) Redies on February 28 authorized a meeting between West Germany’s head envoy in Beirut and PLO deputy chairman Abu Youssef (who was also Black September’s operations officer), which took place on April 5, 1973; with Frangi as interpreter, Walter Nowak and Youssef discussed the political and financial terms for establishing a “basis of trust” between the Palestinians and the FRG.\(^{29}\)

Bonn also moved to restore its shaken ties with Egypt, whose leader, Anwar Sadat, was now under pressure from Arab rivals, a restive military, and student protests, along with an increasingly acute foreign-exchange shortage and massive foreign debt.\(^{30}\) But the Brandt government moved cautiously. On February 8, after difficult negotiations, the FRG and Egypt quietly signed a Capital Assistance Treaty of DM 160 million,


\(^{27}\) Redies to embassies in Tunis and Tripoli, Dec. 11, 1972, Redies Aufzeichnung, Dec. 22, 1972, AAPD 1972 3:1794 95, 1880 83; Redies Aufzeichnung, Jan. 5, 1973, AAPD 1973 1:18 19. Audland to FCO, Jerusalem, Jan. 19, 1973, GB NA FCO 93/129; also Ben Ari to FM, Bonn, Mar. 13, 1973, ISA 130 2332/15rawn. Libya, which supplied 28 percent of the FRG’s oil, had been ruled since 1969 by Muammar Gaddafi, an avid Palestinian supporter who nonetheless wished to expand his country’s economic ties with Germany; Tunisia, ruled by Habib Bourguiba, had very close economic, political, and personal ties with Bonn.


but the West German negotiators also arranged for interest repayment on Egypt’s existing DM 469 million debt.\footnote{Bergstraesser to Schmidt, Bonn, Jan. 5, 1973, AdsD Schmidt 1HSSA/A006064; Steltzer to AA, Cairo, Feb. 12, 1973, AAPD 1973 1:234 35.}

On the diplomatic front, Brandt was even more circumspect. On March 1, he received Sadat’s National Security Advisor, Hafez Ismail, who was at the end of a whirlwind two-week journey to Moscow, London, Washington, and New York, seeking Great Power and UN support to restart the Middle East negotiations.\footnote{Sadat’s diplomatic campaign had begun in January with his visit to Yugoslav president Tito, \textit{New York Times}, Jan. 12, 1973, p. 4.} Brandt, although endorsing the “traditional friendship” between their two countries, underlined the “historical burdens” that inhibited the FRG from taking an active role in the Middle East conflict. Moreover, while agreeing on the importance of the Palestinian question, Brandt warned Cairo against seeking a “final” (endgültige) solution, recommending instead the policy of “intermediate steps” that had guided his Ostpolitik.\footnote{Brandt Ismail talks, Mar. 1, 1973, AdsD WBA A 9/26. Ben Horin, whom the AA later briefed on this meeting, bristled over Ismail’s insistence apparently not challenged by Brandt that a regional peace required Israel to drop its Western ties and “become a Middle East state,” something Bonn had not been required to do by the Soviets in pursuit of its Ostpolitik. Ben Horin to FM, May 16, 1973, ISA 130 6808/4 ץ.}

In late May – scheduled deliberately before Brandt’s trip to Israel, but delayed a few months because of the foreign minister’s illness – Walter Scheel embarked on a weeklong journey to Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, the first visits by a major West German official since relations were ruptured in 1965.\footnote{Macan to FCO, Bonn, May 30, 1973, GB NA FCO 93/232; Falin to Gromyko, Bonn, June 4, 1973, AVP RF 757/18/103/34.} Prepared to do business, Scheel discussed West German financial and technical support, including joint oil and gas projects with Egypt; increasing Jordan’s development aid to DM 100 million; and granting Lebanon a low-interest DM 20 million loan.\footnote{TG memoranda (2): Summary of Scheel Visit to the Middle East, June 13, 1973, UNA S0904 0015 1 FRG.} But in its first major diplomatic initiative outside Europe, the FRG had little to offer the divided and dispirited Arabs. While endorsing Security Council Resolution 242 and calling for justice for the Palestinians, Scheel added to Sadat’s frustration by repeating Brandt’s cautions against clinging to the maximalist “illusions,” which Bonn had courageously abandoned in pursuing its Ostpolitik. He suggested that instead of relying on the Superpowers, the countries involved – following the FRG’s example – should boldly seize the initiative for peace.\footnote{Steltzer to AA, Cairo, May 29, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104771, Redies Aufzeichnung, May 30, 1973, AAPD 1973 2:896 901; Lankes to AA, Beirut, June 12, 1973, ibid., pp. 977 81.}
Although Kissinger, by pronouncing 1973 the “year of Europe,” had suggested an augmented US involvement with the continent, it was the FRG – more financially and politically stable and about to enter the United Nations – that took the more active role in Europe. In the winter, Bonn led the financial discussions between the EEC and Washington. And in the spring, the Brandt government devised two key compromises that completed its Ostpolitik: settling its long-standing dispute with Yugoslavia over the latter’s demand for war reparations by substituting a generous capital assistance program; and concluding the drawn-out negotiations with Czechoslovakia by resolving their political and legal dispute over the legitimacy of the 1938 Munich Accord.

By contrast, the FRG assumed a largely passive role in the looming Middle East crisis. Brandt, in his private talks with European and US leaders, encountered a deepening fatalism. French president Georges Pompidou insisted that it was up to the Superpowers to restrain their respective clients; but in April, Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, who had met with Sadat in January and sent warnings to the five permanent Security Council members and the pope, stressed the “extraordinary danger” posed by the Egyptian leader’s increasing desperation, the Israeli refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories, and US inactivity.

Even before the June summit, the Superpowers were at an impasse. In Washington on May 1, Brandt met with a distracted and noncommittal Nixon. Three weeks later, during Brezhnev’s historic visit to Bonn, the

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39 Oldřich Tůma, “The Difficult Path to the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany,” in Fink and Schaefer, Ostpolitik, 1969 1974, pp. 66 69. Puttkamer to AA, June 12, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104768, reporting strongly positive Israeli press responses: “The crown of Brandt’s Ostpolitik,” “Brandt’s place in history is now assured,” “He has recognized the verdict of World War II and undermined the raging Cold War in Europe.” The formal treaty was signed in Prague on December 11, 1973.
Soviet leader criticized Sadat’s saber rattling (which he had tried to curb) but still hoped for a US-Soviet-brokered agreement.\textsuperscript{43}

Upon Scheel’s return from the Middle East, there were candid Anglo-German talks.\textsuperscript{44} Prime Minister Edward Heath scored Israel’s hard-line policies and Washington’s dangerous complacency toward the Arab threat to the West’s oil supply. Given the real possibility of a “suicidal” move by Sadat, there could be no preventing a Superpower conflict that would engulf Europe as well.\textsuperscript{45} Brandt, with a renewed sense of urgency, headed for Jerusalem on June 7, 1973, intent on listening but also on conveying his and his partners’ concerns.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Israel: Awaiting the October Elections}

Despite the international tension focused on the Middle East, Israel entered the year 1973 on an upbeat note. On January 8, Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir delivered an early present for Israel’s twenty-fifth anniversary: the first balanced budget in its history. There would be no new taxes; included was a 26 percent increase in expenditures on education, housing, health and welfare; and for the first time since 1967, Israel would allocate more money for social services (40 percent) than for security (31 percent).\textsuperscript{47} Nonetheless, the Israeli military remained exceptionally strong, with the most modern weapon systems (including advanced rocketry), an outsized local armaments industry, highly trained personnel, and nuclear potential as well.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, Israel’s might was proudly on display during the May 7 Independence Day celebration in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{43} Vieraugengespräch mit Breschnew, May 20, 1973, AdsD WBA A9 3/32.
\textsuperscript{44} Anders Aufzeichnung, June 1, 1973, ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ben Horin to FM, May 25, 1973, ISA 130 6808/454; Brandt interview, Israeli television, June 1, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104772.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{New York Times}, May 8, 1973, p. 2, reported the highlight: Before a 300,000 member audience, “a spectacular flypast by scores of Israeli Phantom, Skyhawk, and Mirage fighters thunder[ed] over the city ... leaving brilliant white trails over a flawless blue sky,” which Jordan, in a protest to the UN, called an “ugly exhibition of force in the heart of a city of peace and holiness,” ibid., May 9, p. 17. For another view: Amos Elon, “Israel
Israel’s economic boom in the early 1970s (although marred by a 20 percent inflation rate that triggered strikes and social unrest) had been largely fed by the step-by-step integration of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights – expanding its imports and exports and also providing some sixty thousand Arab laborers commuting from their homes to work in construction, agriculture, and manufacturing and paid lower wages than Israeli citizens; by the new industries set up in the occupied territories with special economic privileges and the subcontracting by Israeli companies to West Bank firms; and by the settlement-building in the territories, now numbering forty-four in 1973 and housing five thousand Israelis and with an additional thirty-five planned.

Israelis were divided over their country’s rule over the occupied territories and over one million additional Arabs, between security advocates (buttressed by business interests and religious militants) and those concerned with the future of their democracy and regional peace. Polls in 1973 indicated that a majority favored maintaining control over the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan, and key parts of the Sinai; but the ruling coalition was deeply split between Dayan’s insistence on more intense Israeli settlement and Sapir’s cautions against the domestic and international consequences of this form of “creeping annexation,” with the prime minister standing in the middle.

Meir, who turned seventy-five in April, was still widely admired by the Israeli populace. One month earlier, she had announced her candidacy for reelection, thereby averting a fratricidal conflict between the Labor Party’s hawks and doves. Yet despite her self-presentation abroad as a conciliatory diplomat seeking peace, Meir had decided to yield to her country’s rightward drift. Alarmed by Dayan’s challenge to her...
leadership (reinforcing the fiery opposition leader Menachem Begin’s refusal to return the captured territories), Meir threw her support behind the popular defense minister. Consequently, on August 22, after spirited debate, the Mapai leadership approved the ostensible compromise (but in fact hard line) Galili plan as its electoral program on dealing with the occupied Arab territories. And on September 3, the entire party—braving US displeasure, international censure, and its doves’ protests—unanimously adopted the document, which called for a $298 million allocation for the economic integration of the West Bank and Gaza, including an expansion of the settlements and increasing land purchases (together with the abrogation of the current ban on private sales). The Galili plan also included government incentives for Israeli businesspeople in the occupied territories and a concession to the doves: enhanced infrastructure and social and economic services for the Arab inhabitants and refugees.

Israeli foreign policy was exceptionally active through most of 1973. To refute charges of her country’s isolation (and also of her physical decline), Meir began the year with a strenuous journey to Europe. Her first stop was Paris, where on January 13 and 14 she took part in the Executive Bureau of the Socialist International. Speaking to her socialist colleagues, Meir vigorously defended Israeli policies and also

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Richard Holbrooke, “Israel’s Next Step,” Washington Post, Sept. 9, 1973, predicted that the controversial Galili plan would be dropped after the election; and following the Oct. 1973 war and Labor’s victory in Dec., the party indeed abandoned it.

57 But also undertaken under extremely tight security arrangements because of threats of assassination by Black September and of anti-Israeli demonstrations by French radical leftists and Palestinians.

58 Although four other socialist prime ministers were present, the Pompidou government singled out Meir for attending the gathering, hosted by opposition leader François Mitterrand on the eve of France’s Mar. elections and thereby “blatantly interfering” in its domestic affairs. MAE to Fr. Amb. Tel Aviv, Paris, Dec. 22, 1972, Huré to Raymond, Tel Aviv, Jan. 3, 1973, AN Pompidou 5 AG 2 1032; Blomeyer to AA, Paris, Jan. 8, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104776.

Anxious to avoid a clash with Pompidou, Willy Brandt had sent the newly elected Bundestag president Annemarie Renger to represent his party.
helped block a resolution censuring America's Christmas bombing of North Vietnam. 59 Despite the misgivings of her foreign minister and the snub by French officialdom, Meir made a bold appearance in a capital that had frozen bilateral relations with Israel for six years and she stirred a small measure of popular pressure for a thaw. 60

Proceeding to Rome, Meir became the first Israeli prime minister to meet privately with the pope, although the visit, which lasted an hour and twenty minutes and began with a tense exchange, was stronger in symbolism than substance. 61 Despite Meir’s upbeat (and unprecedented) press statement immediately afterward, Paul VI – who was reluctant to antagonize the Arab world – continued to refuse diplomatic relations with Israel, insisted on the internationalization of the Holy Places in Jerusalem, and defended the rights of the Palestinian refugees. 62 On her last stop in Geneva, Meir met an old friend, Ivory Coast president Félix Houphouët-Boigny, one of Israel’s last partners in Africa, who held out little hope of stemming the tide of broken relations with other countries on the Continent.63

In late February, Meir embarked on another demanding but also highly successful two-week journey to the United States, during which she collected two honorary degrees, addressed large and sympathetic audiences in several cities, and faced only small crowds of anti-Israel protestors. Arriving in Washington on the heels of the unproductive talks between Sadat’s envoy, Hafez Ismail, and Nixon and Kissinger, 64 Meir was gently prodded by the two US leaders to show more flexibility and also warned of the looming oil crisis. Combining her emphasis on Israel’s military strength with an endorsement of peace negotiations, Meir agreed

to a possible interim agreement with Egypt, but she refused to allow the United States to make any commitments on Israel’s behalf and rejected any final peace arrangement with Egypt without full recognition. 65 Two weeks later, news leaked of Nixon’s commitment to Meir on March 1 to provide Israel with four squadrons of Skyhawk and Phantom jets over the next two years and to help it develop an advanced jet of its own design, infuriating Sadat and elating Meir’s supporters. 66

Tensions continued to escalate in the Middle East in 1973 as the Superpowers continued to arm their clients, Palestinian guerrillas continued their assaults on Israeli and Western targets, 67 and Israel continued to issue forceful responses. But after a series of politically damaging incidents, Israel elicited increasing international disapproval. On February 22, two Israeli fighter jets shot down a civilian Libyan airliner en route from Tripoli to Cairo that had strayed over the occupied Sinai desert, stirring widespread denunciations and universal sympathy for the 106 victims. 68 One month later, Israel’s daring sea and airborne attack on Black September bases in northern Lebanon was condemned by the UN Security Council in an 11–0 vote. 69 In July, the Mossad’s assassination of a Moroccan waiter in Norway (who had been mistaken for Black September leader Ali Hassan Salameh) resulted in the arrest of a half dozen Israeli agents and a deeply embarrassing diplomatic episode. 70 And in August, Israeli jets intercepted a Lebanese airliner en route from Beirut to Baghdad with eighty-five passengers and crew on

67 Among the most dramatic terrorist incidents in 1973 was Black September’s Mar. 1 seizure of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Khartoum, detaining ten hostages and demanding the release of prisoners in Israeli jails and members of the Baader Meinhof group as well as Sirhan Sirhan, the convicted murderer of Robert Kennedy being held in a US prison. After the Nixon administration refused to negotiate, the Palestinians murdered one Belgian and two US diplomats. Timothy Naftali, Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 69 73.
69 The United States, the USSR, and China all abstained. Although the United States had watered down the originally strong anti Israeli language, it objected to the resolution’s failure to condemn the terrorism involved in the recent killing of two US envoys as well as a Belgian diplomat in Khartoum; the Soviets wanted anti Israeli sanctions; and China disapproved of the resolution’s “ambiguity” between aggressor and victims. New York Times, Apr. 22, 1973, p. 1; Washington Post, Apr. 22, 1973, p. 1; also Nowak to AA, Beirut, Apr. 11, 1973, Hassell to AA, New York, Apr. 24, 1973, copies in BayHStA StK16182.
board, forcing it to land in northern Israel where authorities had vainly hoped to seize PFLP leader George Habash, author of the 1972 Lod Airport attack.71 A unanimous Security Council condemned the skyjacking.72

Caught in a deadly cycle of violence and retaliation and aggrieved by the UN’s failure to condemn Palestinian terrorism, Israel continued to seek diplomatic support. In July, Meir and Eban signaled their interest in a much-publicized mediation offer by Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, which failed to materialize.73 In August, Eban traveled to Latin America in a futile attempt to counter Arab pressure in the region and stem the disaffection of Israel’s former diplomatic allies.74 Israel was cheered by Nixon’s nomination of Henry Kissinger as the new US secretary of state75 but stoic over Kurt Waldheim’s failed five-nation Middle East mission (the first by a UN secretary-general in six years).76

Another blow fell on September 10 when, in the midst of the Fourth Non-Aligned Summit Meeting in Algiers, Fidel Castro announced the severing of Cuba’s relations with Israel, threatening a new wave of diplomatic

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Earlier that year, the peripatetic Eban had also traveled to Geneva in Jan., to London twice in Feb. and May, to Austria in Mar., and to the United States and Canada in May. New York Times, Aug. 24, 1973, p. 11.


ruptures. Moreover, during this tumultuous five-day meeting, the seventy-six Third World delegates—facing the thaw in the Cold War, the near end of Western colonialism, and the reality of their vastly different politics and wealth—could agree on only one issue: condemning Israel’s occupation of Arab territory and threatening diplomatic and economic boycotts.  

Finally, on the first day of the Jewish New Year there was another terrorist attack in Europe. In an echo of the events a year earlier in Munich, early on the morning of September 28 two heavily armed Palestinians, calling themselves the Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution, seized five Soviet Jews as their train crossed the border into Austria. They then forced an Austrian customs official to drive them in a commandeered Volkswagen bus to Vienna’s Schwechat Airport, where the weapon-loaded vehicle was parked on the tarmac. Thereupon they demanded a plane to take them and the hostages to an Arab country where they would trade their captives for Palestinians in Israeli jails. They also demanded the cessation of Soviet-Jewish passage through Austria.

Now in the spotlight, Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky sought to end the crisis peacefully; but he also refused to allow the hostages to be flown out of his country or to bar the entry of Soviet Jews. After thirteen hours of negotiations, aided by the Egyptian, Iraqi, and Lebanese ambassadors, a deal was concluded: In return for the hostages’ release, Kreisky offered to close the Schönau Transit Camp—the heavily guarded facility operated since 1965 by the Jewish Agency where more than seventy thousand Soviet Jews had been processed before their flight to Israel—and also to provide a plane and crew to carry the Palestinians to Libya.

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Although both Superpowers were also criticized at the conference, the Soviet Union came off worse, with only Castro defending Moscow’s support of the Third World. Nazelle to MAE, Moscow, Sept. 8, Nègre to MAE, Damascus, Sept. 13, Kosciusko Morizet to MAE, Moscow, Oct. 12, 1973, FMAE Europe/URSS 1971 76 Z3705.

78 After the USSR and its allies had broken off diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967 and banned direct flights between Moscow and Tel Aviv, Jews immigrating to Israel from the Soviet Union as well as from Poland and Czechoslovakia had been forced to travel by train to Austria (which issued transit visas at the border) before flying to Tel Aviv. Meir, My Life, pp. 399–400.


Predictably, Kreisky came under heavy criticism, and especially from the United States and from Israel. Nixon, although sympathetic to Austria’s delicate geopolitical position, insisted, “We simply cannot have governments, small or large, give in to international blackmail by terrorist groups.”81 Golda Meir, after delivering a passionate plea to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to “wipe out terrorism,” traveled to Vienna to confront her fellow socialist (and Jewish) comrade, who refused to reverse his decision.82 And Abba Eban scored Austria’s “encouragement to terrorism” at the UN General Assembly.83 Escalating its criticism, the Israeli government termed the closing of Schönau an assault on the essential human right to move freely and safely between one country and another, and the press likened Kreisky’s decision to the 1938 Munich agreement.84

In fact, Kreisky’s decision – which was supported by 79 percent of the Austrian public – had almost no effect on Soviet-Jewish emigration: The number of Soviet Jews transiting Austria was not diminished; there were no further Palestinian attacks on immigrants on Austrian soil; and, after the UN High Commissioner for Refugees turned down Kreisky’s proposal to take over the transit camp, Soviet Jews continued to be processed in a more low-profile Red Cross facility no longer under Israeli control.85 To be sure, this new arrangement now enabled the émigrés to choose destinations other than Israel.86

Kreisky had long wished to close the facility, guarded both by Austrian police and Israeli forces, which impinged on Austria’s sovereignty and compromised its neutral status; it had also become a tourist attraction visited by Israeli dignitaries and therefore a security risk: “Spiegel Interview mit Österreichs Bundeskanzler Kreisky,” Der Spiegel 41 (Oct. 8, 1973), p. 120; also Bruno Kreisky, Memoiren: Im Strom der Politik, vol. 2 (Vienna: Kremayr & Scheriau, 2000), p. 322.


The Schönau crisis may also have had another result – more immediate and damaging. The weeklong clamor may have diverted the Israeli leadership’s attention from the Syrian military buildup on its northern border.87

West Germany and Israel

New Strains

Although Willy Brandt’s long-delayed visit dominated West German–Israeli relations during the first half of 1973, there were other difficult issues between the two countries. Despite Puttkamer’s strong efforts, cultural ties between the two countries – except for youth exchanges – remained brittle.88 Another sensitive matter was the languishing campaign launched three years earlier by Nahum Goldmann for a new restitution arrangement for the victims of National Socialism who had been excluded from the original 1952 agreement. Although lacking an official role in Goldmann’s negotiations with Bonn, Israel, as the primary destination of the post-1965 immigrants, had a major stake

87 Davar on Oct. 2, 1973, downplayed the Syrian reinforcement near the Golan, ascribing it to the “improvement in Syrian Jordanian relations” and a movement of troops to “where they were more needed”; but on Nov. 7 it reported a Stern interview in a secret place outside Beirut with one of the two Palestinians, who claimed that the Schönau attack had succeeded in drawing Israel into a “trap.”


Even without recognizing the Schönau feint, Israeli leaders misjudged the Syrian buildup despite a warning by King Hussein of Jordan of a planned attack to regain the Golan. Thus, at a secret government meeting on Oct. 3, during which Dayan fretted that this mobilization appeared to be neither a “normal defensive move” nor preparation for a retaliatory action following the air battle two weeks earlier, Chief of Staff David Elazar insisted that according to Israeli intelligence neither Syria nor Egypt was prepared for war. Uri Bar Joseph, The Watchmen Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 122 31; background and details: pp. 81 89, 92 99, 107 8, 114, 117 18.

in their success;\textsuperscript{89} but Goldmann’s high hopes for a new agreement in 1973 made no headway against the resistance of Finance Minister Helmut Schmidt and the near disappearance of supporters in the second Brandt government.\textsuperscript{90} Moreover, there was also considerable delay in settling Bonn’s annual DM 140 million capital aid to Israel, which, although finally signed in the beginning of October, was then delayed until the close of hostilities and brought the predictable Arab protests.\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{The Brandt Visit}

Six months before his historic trip, Brandt had dispatched an SPD luminary to Israel to test the political climate. Between December 30, 1972, and January 3, 1973, the mayor and senate president of Bremen, Hans Koschnick, met with Israeli Labor officials and youth leaders, and also with Mapai MPs and cabinet members, including Eban and Meir.\textsuperscript{92} Koschnick, who combined reassuring words with acknowledgment of their differences, strongly rebutted Israeli protests over Bonn’s appeasement policy toward the Palestinians, insisting that they understand “the German government with which they were dealing” – a country not at war

\textsuperscript{89} Puttkamer to AA, Apr. 12, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104771. At the same time, Israel had also submitted new claims to Bonn on behalf of medically incapacitated Holocaust survivors that it hoped to keep separate from Goldmann’s negotiations. Sapir to Ben Horin, Apr. 11, 1973, Ya’acov to Sapir, May 18, 1973, ISA 130 6808/4\textsuperscript{诈}.

\textsuperscript{90} Ben Horin to FM, Feb. 7, 1973, Ben Horin to Sapir, Apr. 6, 1973, ISA 130 6808/4\textsuperscript{诈}.

In August, after the seventy eight year old Jewish emissary had threatened to unleash a public campaign against the FRG’s foot dragging, Brandt asked for a concrete proposal. The timing, however, was unpropitious: When two months later Goldmann presented Bonn with a DM 1 billion figure, the outbreak of the October war forced the restitution issue off the table. Ya’acov to Sapir, Aug. 30, 1973, ISA 130 6803/4\textsuperscript{诈}, Katzenstein to Kagan, Sept. 15, 1973, CC Post 1965; Per Fischer to Brandt, Oct. 5, 1973, Scheel to Brandt, Oct. 8, 1973, Brandt to Scheel, Nov. 5, 1973, AdsD Schmidt 1HSAA 008999; also Katzenstein to Kagan, Oct. 11, 19, Nov. 5, Dec. 13, 1973, CC Post 1965; Ya’acov to FM and Sapir, Sept. 14, Oct. 19, 1973, Ben Horin to FM, Oct. 15, 17, 1973, ISA 130 6803/4\textsuperscript{诈}.


However, the \textit{Auswärtiges Amt}, invoking diplomatic complications with the Arabs, had vetoed an ambitious Israeli capital investment proposal: Hermes Aufzeichnungen, Apr. 10, 25, June 7, 1973, Redies Aufzeichnung, Aug. 2, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104779.

\textsuperscript{92} As a member of the SPD leadership council, Koschnick was representing his party and not the Brandt government.
with the Arabs. Hinting that Brandt’s much-desired visit required a positive signal from Jerusalem, Koschnick encouraged the Meir government to quell the anti-German clamor.93

Finally, on April 2 West Germany and Israel jointly announced the Brandt visit, which would begin on June 7.94 Because of the Scheel visit beforehand to Egypt, Sadat raised no objection; but he also invited Brandt to visit Cairo in 1974.95 The Auswärtiges Amt, which had insisted on the delay, now had to fend off Arab criticism of the sensitive date – the sixth anniversary of the June 1967 war – but it refused another postponement.96

Not unexpectedly, the chancellor’s five-day journey fell under a glaring public spotlight.97 As Israel prepared to welcome a world leader whose support it required, the German public, the Arab world, and the FRG’s eight European partners uneasily awaited the results. Not only was Brandt the first sitting West German chancellor to visit Israel; he was also the first major foreign leader to visit that country since the 1967 war and also shortly after Israel’s gala twenty-fifth anniversary celebration.98


97 On the eve of his journey, Brandt also faced a major political scandal: CDU deputy Julius Steiner’s announcement that he had received a DM 50,000 bribe from the SPD to abstain from his party’s Apr. 27, 1972, no confidence motion (which, it was revealed in the 1990s, had come from the Stasi), resulting in the motion’s failure. Harpprecht, Im Kanzleramt, pp. 173 76; cf. “Barzels Waterloo Brandts Watergate,” Die Zeit Online, June 8, 1973, http://www.zeit.de/1973/24/barzels waterloo brandt watergate; “Die sind alle so misträuisch,” Der Spiegel 23 (June 4, 1973), pp. 24 29, “Das ist nur die Verhölle,” ibid., 24 (June 11, 1973), pp. 21 27; further details in Peter Merseburger, Willy Brandt, 1913 1992: Visionär und Realist (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 2002), pp. 689 92.

98 Brandt had initially wished to delay the trip until September (after the FRG’s entry into the UN) but recognized the difficulty of arriving in Israel on the eve of its Oct. elections. Carole Fink, “‘The Most Difficult Journey of All’: Willy Brandt’s Trip to Israel in June 1973,” International History Review 37, no. 3 (June 2015): 507.
The reluctant guest, who was aware of the journey’s historic importance, chose his entourage as carefully as possible to include several figures sympathetic to Israel. But Brandt arrived in Israel neither as a penitent nor an ally but as a deft, bold, and charismatic politician who on several journeys had already acknowledged the difficult German past while focusing primarily on the present and future. Thus, at the airport ceremony a somber Brandt, speaking in English, announced, “The sum

99 State Secretary Reinhard Wilke and speechwriter Klaus Harpprecht (accompanied by his wife, Renate, a survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen); Walter Hesselbach, chairman of the board of the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft with close ties to Israel; Werner Nachmann, chairman of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, and Günter Grass, now on his third trip to Israel who balanced the three more reserved foreign ministry officials, state secretary Paul Frank, ministerial director of the Political Section Lothar Lahn, and the Middle East Section director Helmut Redies. Willy Brandt, Begegnungen und Einsichten: Die Jahre 1960–1975 (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1976), p. 592. But among the significant absentees were Finance Minister Helmut Schmidt, World Jewish Congress president Nahum Goldmann (who, because of his outspoken dovish views, was on extremely bad terms with Meir and Eban), and Brandt’s wife Rut; Wilke, Meine Jahre mit Willy Brandt, pp. 141–42.

100 Ledwidge to Douglas Hume, Tel Aviv, June 20, 1973, GB NA FCO 93/129; also Fink, “The Most Difficult Journey of All,” p. 504.
of the suffering and the horror cannot be removed from the consciousness of our people,” but he also called for a “new beginning.” And at the ceremonial wreath-laying in the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem, there was no gesture of contrition. In an audible German, the chancellor read from Psalm 103: “Merciful and gracious is the Lord . . . Not forever will he retain his anger . . . As far as day is from night, so hath he relieved us from our transgressions.”

Brandt, who had braced himself for frank discussions, met with every major Israeli politician. The private talks covered two major issues, the Middle East and the Israeli–West German relationship, and there was considerable divergence on both sides. On the prospects for peace, Brandt and Meir shared their recent conversations with third parties. Brandt urged Israelis to display “flexibility”; but Meir (like the Egyptians) rejected the parallel with his Ostpolitik and brushed aside the chancellor’s endorsement of Superpower- or UN-mediated negotiations.

In separate talks, Israeli officials rebutted the Germans’ alarm over a looming war and oil crisis, insisting that the Israeli-Arab conflict was a local issue that would eventually be settled by the local actors.

On their bilateral ties, the Israelis resisted the chancellor’s formulation of “normal relations with a special historical character,” an ambiguous commitment at best. Despite Brandt’s efforts to put paid to the past,

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101 Huré to FMAE, Tel Aviv, June 8, 1973, FMAE Europe/RFA 1971 76 Z 2993. Details in Harpprecht, Im Kanzleramt, pp. 183 84; Merseburger, Willy Brandt, pp. 682 83. Israeli suspicions of Scheel’s effort to block another Kniefall (which would complicate Bonn’s Arab diplomacy) in Hestermann, Inszenierte Versöhnung, p. 192.

Earlier, at the airport arrival ceremony, Brandt had declared that Meir’s warm reception constituted an important step in overcoming the past and facing the “requirements of the present.” New York Times, p. 5, Washington Post, June 8, 1973, p. 1. But in his late night interview with the young journalist Wibke Bruhns (Nachrichtenzeit: Meine unfertigen Erinnerungen [Munich: Droemer, 2012], pp. 103 4), the chancellor stressed the “urgency” of this visit.


Meir insisted throughout his visit on Germany’s “historical responsibility” to Israel. Lamenting Israel’s isolation, she and her colleagues were skeptical over German assurances that Israeli interests were not threatened by the FRG’s expanding relations with the Arabs and its entry into the UN, or by the political ambitions of the enlarged EEC. These concerns were reinforced by Brandt’s refusal to make commitments to expand military ties between the two countries, make additional restitution payments, or conclude an investment agreement and also by Brandt’s repeated rejection of the role of an intermediary in the Middle East conflict.

In his public appearances, the chancellor underlined his determination to redefine the German–Israeli relationship. Before arriving, Brandt, in an interview on Israel television, had confirmed the growing pro-Palestinian sentiment among German youth and declared that almost three decades after the Holocaust a growing number of his compatriots felt themselves unconnected with the Nazi past. In addressing the Central Committee of Israel’s governing Labor Party, he acknowledged the FRG’s commitment to defend Israel’s existence but added that his government would also stand for the “rights of the victims of the Middle East conflict” and resist all forms of pressure to choose its friends or its enemies.

Brandt’s minutely scripted itinerary reflected the message of a gracious, self-confident German guest with an impeccable anti-Nazi record, a Nobel Peace Prize, and a leadership position in the EEC. There were few hostile demonstrations. The chancellor’s schedule included


111 Sauvagnargues to MAE, Bonn, June 6, 1973, FMAE Europe/RFA 1971 76, Z1974. Although the Springer press continued to support Israel, in mid June Der Spiegel and the mass market Stern had published highly critical articles on the occasion of Israel’s twentieth anniversary, and a forty minute television documentary had described the ill treatment of Israeli Arabs; in addition, the “compensation issue” was not helping Israel’s image in the FRG. Ben Ari to Meroz, Bonn, May 15, 1973, ISA 130 6808/4. According to a national public opinion poll on June 1, 1973, only 37 percent of the West German population recorded pro Israeli sentiments, a dramatic drop in six years. Ben Horin to FM, June 1, 1973, ibid., 5332/5 (5 percent favored the Arabs, 37 percent supported neither side and 21 percent had no opinion).


a private Old City tour, unaccompanied by Israeli officials, to the three major religious sites; a welcoming Sabbath stay on a kibbutz combined with a fishing adventure on the Galilee; a giant reception for the Israeli intellectual and cultural elite hosted by Puttkamer where he addressed former German Jews in their native tongue and met briefly with David Ben-Gurion; and the dramatic Masada trip followed by an honorary doctorate at the Weizmann Institute of Science (which was heavily funded by the FRG) and a speech calling peace the new “normality.”

The final leave-taking on June 11 was cordial. Meir, who had once refused to set foot in Germany, used the word “friendship” in her closing remarks and accepted Brandt’s invitation for a reciprocal visit. The chancellor on his part agreed to Meir’s request to set up a direct channel of communications and also to transfer a secret message to Sadat, but he declined to sign a formal agreement or issue a joint communiqué. Under a bright sun, the two leaders simply restated their positions, Meir recalling the “dreadful tragedy that Nazi Germany had inflicted on the Jewish people” and calling on the chancellor to remain conscious of his country’s “historic responsibility” toward Israel, and Brandt responding that they both were aware of the duties owed “to our respective offices and to our peoples.”


In almost every press account, Brandt’s visit was judged a far greater success for the chancellor than for Israel. West German journalists lauded his forceful assertion of Bonn’s interests. The *International Herald Tribune* on June 13 termed the five days “the end or at least the revamping of the special relationship.” After warily scrutinizing the details, the Arab press offered no criticisms of Brandt’s words or his deeds. Brandt had made a strong case for normalization between the two countries, but without specifying its character.

The Israelis tried hard to swallow their disappointment. The visit had been touted as “one of the most important ... since our founding.” Soon afterward, Israel hosted leaders of the German–Israeli Association who offset Brandt’s reserved stance with strong expressions of support. But Israeli attempts that summer to secure additional West German loans and investment capital, expand trade, and increase arms purchases all met resistance in Bonn, and its effort to obtain concessions on its agricultural and industrial exports hit a stone wall in Brussels.

Indeed, the entire international scene had darkened in mid-1973, with a plunging dollar, a Franco-German verbal spat over the EEC’s future, and rising tensions in the Middle East, culminating in an aerial dogfight—the largest since 1967—over Syria as well as the coup in Chile on September 11.

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120 Steltzer to AA, Cairo, June 13, 1973, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104772; Falin to Gromyko, Bonn, June 19, 1973, AVP RF 757/18/103/34.


Together in the UN

A historic moment occurred on September 18, 1973, in New York City: the culmination of détente. East and West Germany became the 133rd and 134th members of the United Nations, and this was also the first partitioned country to enter the world organization.124 The Federal Republic, now a full-fledged member of the world community, would be scrutinized for its voice and its votes, especially over the Middle East. Testing Bonn’s fidelity, the Israeli ambassador warned against “submerging [West Germany’s] identity into the EEC,” which brought a sharp retort from State Secretary Paul Frank: “We cannot enter the UN enslaved to all kinds of automatic commitments.”125

Israel stood alone on September 18. Defying one of the capstones of détente and Ostpolitik, Ambassador Josef Tekoah announced his opposition to the admission of East Germany, because of that country’s refusal to assume moral and financial responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich. When this announcement generated strong rebuttals from Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Israeli violations of the UN charter and threats to oppose West Germany’s entry, the United States pressed Tekoah to withdraw his motion for a separate vote.126

Willy Brandt’s debut speech before the United Nations General Assembly clouded the picture. Speaking in German, in an address that stressed the links between peace, justice, and human rights, Brandt echoed Meir’s position and called for direct negotiations between Arabs and Israelis.127 Thereupon, on the eve of a new war

125 Ben Horin to FM, Sept. 11, 1973, ISA 130/6803/4צ.
Scheel had to face nine irate Arab emissaries over the Bonn government’s seeming abandonment of its neutrality.128

**The Fourth Arab-Israeli War**

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. on October 6 – on the tenth day of Ramadan and on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement – Egyptian and Syrian troops launched a coordinated and an almost complete surprise attack on the Israeli forces on the East Bank of the Suez Canal and on the Golan Heights.129 By the next evening, after heavy fighting and major casualties on both sides, Egypt had broken Bar Lev line and Syrian forces threatened the Galilee. Israel, after having discounted numerous intelligence warnings in the belief that its military power and its enemies’ weakness had made such an assault impossible, belatedly mobilized its reserves, while scores of its tanks and planes were lost to Soviet-made missiles.130

Given the actual military imbalance, almost all observers – and also Anwar Sadat – fully expected Israel to repulse its attackers. Indeed, on the second day of the war the Egyptian president, disregarding his Syrian partner, informed US and Soviet officials that he had no intention of “widening the confrontation” beyond the territory already gained, but was instead aiming at a political settlement that would bring about a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and peace in the region.131 Consequently, while during the next seven days the Syrian army bore the brunt of Israeli air power, tanks, and artillery, the Egyptian army (as observed by Israeli intelligence) dug in.132

Nonetheless, the Arabs’ initial victories and Israel’s delayed response immediately drew in the two Superpowers in order to curtail the fighting

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129 The Israeli government, which for twelve hours had known about the attack (although not the exact time), had decided against a preemptive strike as in 1967, fearing the political and international risks. Daigle, *Limits of Détente*, pp. 294 95.
131 Daigle, *Limits of Détente*, pp. 296 98. That day, Sadat also sent the same message to the French and British ambassadors in Cairo, adding that Egypt’s action “was not aimed against the existence of Israel within its established borders.” AAPD 1973 3:1611, n. 9.
Map 9.1: At the opening of the October 1973 war, a large Syrian force attacked the Golan Heights overlooking Israeli settlements in the Galilee. Subsequently, the Israeli counterattack drove to within twenty miles of Damascus.

and preserve détente. When none of the combatants agreed to a cease-fire – but all pleaded for additional arms – Moscow and Washington moved to contain their clients and also maintain their competitive

\[133\] From day one both sides stayed closely in touch and used the hot line between Washington and Moscow. Daigle, Limits of Détente, pp. 298–99.
Map 9.2: After Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and moved into the Sinai Peninsula, the Israeli counterattack encircled the Egyptian Third Army on the West Bank of the canal.
Thus, on October 10, after Israel had recaptured the entire Golan Heights and turned against the Egyptian forces, Brezhnev ordered a Soviet Air Bridge to transport some fifteen thousand tons of military equipment to Damascus and Cairo. And that day Nixon, responding to urgent Israeli pleas, domestic pressures, and his deep Cold War commitment to stem Soviet expansion, authorized Operation Nickel Grass, a massive airlift from the United States to Israel via the Portuguese Azores of jets, tanks, artillery, ammunition, and other supplies – far larger than the famed relief of Berlin in 1948–1949 – that began on October 14 and proved crucial to the war’s outcome.134 Behind this Superpower arms buildup were the two leaders’ complicated domestic politics: Nixon’s deepening Watergate morass forced him to hand a major part of decision making over to Kissinger, who confronted an increasingly erratic Brezhnev and his hawkish politburo.135

Western Europe, facing a war it had long predicted but was unable to prevent, became a collateral victim. There were two separate but related blows: On October 16, OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), which had wrested control over crude oil prices and production from the multinational oil companies, increased the price of oil by 70 percent, from $3.01 to $5.12 per barrel.136 One day later, in response to Operation Nickel Grass, OAPEC, the seven-member Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) announced a 5 percent reduction in oil production until Israel evacuated the occupied Arab territories. The EEC, already divided in its responses to the Arab attacks, became even more fragmented after OAPEC divided the continent into friendly, neutral, and unfriendly countries, thereby impeding a common West European front.137


136 And also raised the producer governments’ share from $1.99 to $3.44 per barrel. Venn, The Oil Crisis, p. 7. But with prices rising as high as $20 per barrel in Dec. and threatening a global depression, OPEC stepped back and in Jan. 1974 set the posted price at $11.65, including a government take of $7.00. ibid., p. 9.

137 France, Great Britain, and Spain were considered friendly; the United States, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Denmark were subject to a total embargo, and the rest of Europe...
Moreover, while Communist Eastern Europe hewed obediently to the Soviet line, America’s NATO allies, given their vulnerability and their distinctly separate political views, insisted on their neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hence Britain infuriated Kissinger on October 12 by refusing to sponsor a cease-fire resolution in the Security Council, which Egypt, in fact, had opposed. And the weakened Nixon administration, instead of suffering a rebuff, declined to request transit or refueling rights from its allies for the airlift, relying instead on Portugal (in return for US support for its colonial policies in Africa).

While the Superpowers tried to maintain control, the combatants acted. On October 14, Sadat, pressured by his Syrian ally Hafez al-Assad, made the fateful decision to abandon his strong defensive position east of the canal. Without SAM cover or adequate intelligence, the Egyptian army launched a broad attack into the Sinai desert that was easily repulsed by the well-prepared, heavily reinforced and rearmed Israeli troops. After scoring its first major victory on the Suez front, the IDF began its westward advance, crossing the canal two days later and encircling the Egyptian Third Army on October 21.

Facing another Arab military defeat, the Superpowers took charge. On October 20, Kissinger flew to Moscow to draft a joint cease-

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138 Hughes, “Britain, the Transatlantic Alliance, and the Arab Israeli War of 1973,” pp. 22–25. In order to underline its neutrality, the Heath government had declared an embargo on arms transfers to the Middle East and also refused Washington’s request to support reconnaissance flights over the Sinai and Golan Heights, although some intelligence collaboration between the two countries may well have continued, ibid., pp. 20–21.


141 At precisely the moment when Nixon’s presidency was imperiled over the “Saturday night massacre.” (After both attorney general Elliot Richardson and deputy attorney general William Ruckelshaus, had resigned after refusing the president’s order to fire the Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox [who had subpoenaed the president to release the tapes made in the Oval Office], on Oct. 20, US solicitor general Robert Bork, accepted Nixon’s order to fire Cox.) *Washington Post, New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1973.
fire resolution, which the Security Council adopted unanimously two days later. According to Kissinger’s design, Resolution 338 contained something for all sides: the reaffirmation of Resolution 242 demanded by the Arabs, but leaving Israel occupying additional Arab territory as leverage in future negotiations and preserving US-Soviet détente.\footnote{Daigle, *Limits of Détente*, p. 316.}

The war was not yet over, though. To dispel Meir’s fury over the lack of prior consultations, Kissinger gave Israel a green light to ignore the cease-fire. However, as the IDF continued to advance on the West Bank of the canal, an incensed Kremlin went into action, on October 24 proposing either the establishment of a joint US-Soviet military force to enforce the UN resolution or the dispatch of a unilateral Soviet force. Caught off guard at the prospect of a Soviet intervention, Washington raised the stakes dramatically, placing its military forces on a worldwide nuclear alert and ordering the redeployment of its aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean. A day later, Moscow backed down and the Security Council voted still another cease-fire resolution, to which the Israeli cabinet on October 26 reluctantly agreed.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 316–27.}

Israel had vanquished its foes, but at a terrible price: in less than three weeks there were some 11,000 casualties (including 2,700 dead) and 300 IDF soldiers taken prisoner.\footnote{“Stumbling toward Armageddon,” *New York Times*, Oct. 9, 2018, p. 25, cites newly declassified documents on the crisis.}

The Arab attack on October 6 had punctured the myths of Israel’s superior intelligence and military invincibility and shattered public confidence in its government’s diplomatic strategy. It had also undermined the country’s long-standing scorn of the Arabs’ fighting skills, its underestimation of the potency of Soviet weaponry, and its overestimation of Moscow’s ability to restrain its clients.\footnote{Ha’aretz, Sept. 24, 2013, citing declassified documents, reported that at least 86 Israeli POWs were killed by the Egyptian and Syrian forces. (The total Jewish population of Israel in Oct. 1973 was 2.8 million.) Casualties on the other side: Egypt, 12,000 dead, 35,000 wounded; Syria, 2,200 dead, 5,600 wounded. Markus A. Weingardt, *Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik: Die Geschichte einer Gratwanderung seit 1949* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), p. 224, n. 113.}

Even the indispensable American military aid had come with a heavy price: The United States, joining with the Soviets, had denied Israel a total


The surprise attack on Oct. 6 was all the more shocking to a public that only three weeks earlier had cheered the Israeli air force’s downing of thirteen Syrian jets in the largest air battle since 1967. *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 1973, p. 1.}
victory. Arriving in Washington on November 1, Golda Meir faced an administration determined to dictate the terms of an Arab-Israeli peace.

The FRG was deeply involved in the twenty-day Middle East war. Throughout the war, 57 percent of the German public had sympathized with Israel, as did much of the SPD establishment and the opposition CDU. However, the Brandt government’s responses were stumbling and inconsistent, reflecting not only its internal differences but also the need to maintain good relations with the United States. Meir, *My Life*, p. 426.


Bonn’s unique role as an outside actor whose words and gestures were heavily scrutinized by all sides.

From the outset, Brandt appeared to tilt toward a beleaguered Israel. On October 10, the chancellor denounced the Arabs’ “illusion” of a military solution to the Middle East problem.\(^{149}\) Despite Bonn’s official neutrality, the chancellor repeatedly denied a “neutrality of the heart” and castigated the Arabs’ oil “blackmail.”\(^{150}\) Also, early in the war, he had secretly (and illegally) supplied Israel with an indispensable electronic military device from the Bundeswehr’s stores.\(^{151}\) And afterward, starting a tradition that lasted until 2006, he refused to allow German troops to participate in the UN Middle East peacekeeping mission where they might have to engage with Israeli forces.\(^{152}\)

Nonetheless, the fatigued and politically embattled chancellor had also ceded a major role to Scheel and the Aussenwartes Amt, which viewed the crisis as a major threat to Bonn’s security – including the threat of new terrorist attacks.\(^{153}\) Bonn lined up with its European colleagues at the United Nations;\(^{154}\) and on October 13, it adhered to the Nine’s futile call for a cease-fire.\(^{155}\) Working quietly behind the scenes, West German diplomats also worked to prevent a diplomatic break with Bonn’s old and new Arab partners.\(^{156}\)

After October 16, the FRG, which imported 71 percent of its oil from the Arab countries, was vulnerable to the OPEC price hike and the Arab boycott – especially as these affected its export industries. There were also

\(^{152}\) West European Department, Report, Nov. 9, 1973, GB NA PREM 1565; but Bonn consented to provide air transport for the UN mission and to contribute 7.1 percent of its expenses. Ben Ari to FM, Dec. 26, 1973, ISA 130 6803/499.
\(^{154}\) AAPD 1973 3:1531, n. 6.  
\(^{155}\) Text: GB NA FCO 93/266.
the shocks of “carless Sundays” and grounded Lufthansa flights.\textsuperscript{157} On the other hand, Bonn expected that its Ostpolitik would increase its gas and oil imports from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{158}

Despite its fears of a Superpower confrontation, Bonn’s relations with the Soviet Union remained remarkably stable throughout the crisis (something Washington noted suspiciously\textsuperscript{159}). Communications with Moscow remained open, with each side acknowledging the other’s Middle East interests: the special character of the FRG’s relations with Israel, Moscow’s obligations to the Arabs, and Europe’s limited possibilities for intervention.\textsuperscript{160} And notwithstanding the GDR’s charges in various Arab capitals of Bonn’s continuing military ties with Israel,\textsuperscript{161} there were no major threats to West Berlin.

Not unexpectedly, US–West German relations underwent a major break, one that was only partially repaired. The FRG, although heavily dependent on America’s military shield, had grown increasingly critical of the US tendency to ignore its and Europe’s interests; and Washington now insisted on its allies’ complete adherence to its Middle East policies.

The principal clash between the United States and Bonn centered on the American arms transfer to Israel (which the Europeans had generally opposed because it prolonged the fighting). The United States, in addition to the air lift, had clandestinely sent military supplies to Israel from its army bases in West Germany. Scheel, who was given the details at an October 16 meeting with US ambassador Martin Hillenbrand, had initially agreed, despite this clear and risky violation of the FRG’s


\textsuperscript{158} Frank Bösch, “Energy Diplomacy: West Germany, the Soviet Union, and the Oil Crises of the 1970s,” Historical Social Research 39, no. 4 (2014): 165 76; also Iran until the 1979 revolution provided 20 percent of the FRG’s energy supply, Bösch,“Zwischen Schah und Khomeini,” Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 63, no. 3 (July 2015): 322.

\textsuperscript{159} Merseburger, Willy Brandt, pp. 685 86.


neutrality and the breach of NATO’s rules. But eight days later, Bonn reversed its stand because of several factors, including mounting Egyptian protests, the October 22 UN cease-fire resolution, and US assurances that the arms issue had thus been settled. However, on October 23 and 24, there were official and press reports that two Israeli freighters had loaded military cargo—tanks, trucks, jeeps, artillery, and other heavy equipment—and not from US-controlled bases but from German soil: the Nordenham harbor near Bremerhaven.

In a striking display of defiance, Germany on October 24 ordered the third Israeli ship docked in Bremerhaven to depart at once and issued a press release justifying its decision. Attempting to placate the Arabs, Bonn disingenuously denied any knowledge of the earlier arms shipments and publicly accused the United States of violating its neutrality. Nixon and Kissinger were furious over Bonn’s actions, and defense secretary James Schlesinger warned that the United States might withdraw its troops and materiel from the FRG. Jumping on the bandwagon, the CDU/CSU opposition accused the Brandt government of alienating the United States, and the US press reviled the West German chancellor for caving in to Arab pressure. Surprisingly, Israeli journalists were “exceptionally silent” over the US-German spat, although deploring Bonn’s “surrender” to the Arabs.

The already tense situation between Washington and Bonn was exacerbated on October 25 when the United States launched the nuclear alert without consulting its NATO allies. Responding to European objections, Washington insisted on linking the Soviet threat in the Middle East


166 Hibbert telegram, Bonn, Oct. 30, 1973, GB NA Prem 15/1567; however, Springer’s Die Welt, Oct. 30, while joining the condemnation, also wondered why West Germany, which alone with Portugal had aided the resupply of Israel, was being singled out by Washington for censure.

with the defense of the European continent; but led by Bonn, the Europeans protested their treatment as an “American colony.”

There was more to come. On November 6, Bonn took part in the EEC foreign ministers’ conference in Brussels that, under French pressure, drew up a peace plan for the Middle East: (1) negotiations were to be held under UN auspices; (2) Israel would withdraw to its June 4, 1967, borders; and (3) the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people would be respected. Kissinger, who was outraged by the Europeans’ independent gesture – and particularly by their challenge to his solo diplomatic strategy – dismissed the Brussels declaration as an attempt to appease the Arabs and to escape the brunt of their oil weapon.

Israel now moved into the fray. Spurred by Axel Springer’s arrival on November 5 and his expressions of “shame” over his government’s behavior, the Israeli press castigated the Nine for intruding in the US-led negotiations and preferring oil to a Middle East peace. Meir traveled to London where, on November 11, addressing an emergency meeting of the Socialist International leadership – convened at her request (via Willy Brandt) by the pro-Israeli British opposition leader Harold Wilson – she scolded her European comrades for barring the US relief planes from refueling. She also denounced the EEC’s Brussels proposals as exceeding UN Resolution 242 and pointedly dismissed Brandt’s defense of the Nine and the importance of international guarantees.

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Nonetheless, under French pressure, the EEC continued to attempt to coordinate its diplomacy, defense, and economic strategies. There was a hastily organized Copenhagen summit convened in December in the shadows of the UN’s Conference in Geneva: the joint US-Soviet initiative to bring peace to the Middle East. In Copenhagen on December 14, the Nine adopted a historic document defining the “European Identity.”

The limits of EEC solidarity, however, were also exposed at Copenhagen. The appearance of five uninvited Arab ministers (possibly encouraged by Paris) created embarrassment and disarray. The Nine reaffirmed the November 6 Brussels declaration, but German-led opposition thwarted a Franco-British proposal to strengthen its anti-Israel clauses. Moreover, the West Europeans were unable to harmonize their oil policies. The loosening of the Arab boycott along with Kissinger’s adept appeal for a US-European energy conference blocked a coordinated EEC energy policy and further steps to a unified European entity.

Aftermath

After a two-month postponement, Israel’s national elections were finally held on the last day of 1973. It was a notably subdued campaign,
overshadowed by the war’s immense casualties. The country’s sour mood was intensified by leaks from the Commission of Inquiry appointed in late November by Meir under pressure from all the political parties to determine what had gone wrong. Moreover, the country had received another blow on December 1 with the death of the eighty-six-year-old founder, David Ben-Gurion, the legendary embodiment of its former strength and decisiveness.\footnote{New York Times, Dec. 2, 1973, p. 1; see also “David Ben Gurion,” Der Spiegel 50 (Dec. 10, 1973), p. 50.} The sole piece of good news came from Geneva where at the Middle East conference in late December there was a “historic handshake” between Abba Eban and Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, a private meeting between the two, and hints of a resumption of diplomatic relations.\footnote{Herly to MAE, Tel Aviv, Dec. 23, 1973, FMAE Europe/URSS 1971 76 Z3705; Unsigned tel. to Meroz, Jan. 3, 1973, ISA 130 6811/9; also Galia Golan, Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 165–66.}

The October war had shaken the pillars of Israel’s security concept and challenged the belief that its occupation of Arab territory would provide security against an attack.\footnote{Amos Perlmutter, “Israel’s Fourth War, October 1973: Political and Military Misconceptions,” Orbis 19, no. 2 (June 1975): 434–61.} It had also forced Israelis to acknowledge painful diplomatic realities, among them the almost complete diplomatic break with African countries, the increased estrangement from Western Europe, and (as in 1956) the US and Soviet resolve and power to deny them a decisive military victory.\footnote{Jerusalem Post, Nov. 20, 1973.}

Above all, the October war had increased Israeli dependence on the United States for its economic, military, and diplomatic security. The war’s stalemate-ending had enabled Kissinger to control the peace process and to exclude the Soviet Union, the UN, and America’s NATO allies from his bilateral disengagement arrangements. Under US pressure, Israel reluctantly took the first steps toward a withdrawal from Egyptian territory that it had opposed two years earlier.\footnote{Avi Shlaim, The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 327.} On the other hand, Soviet conduct during the war had stirred anti-détente sentiment in the United States, bolstering a pro-Israeli movement among Kissinger’s critics.\footnote{See, esp., John Rosenberg, “The Quest against Détente: Eugene Rostow, the October War, and the Origins of the Anti-Détente Movement, 1969–1976,” Diplomatic History 39, no. 4 (Sept. 2015): 720–44.}

Although not nearly as calamitous for the Federal Republic as for Israel, the October war also had important repercussions for the Brandt government. The German military scrutinized the nineteen-day Middle
East conflict in which highly sophisticated Soviet weapons – including the fixed, mobile, and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles as well as the Sagger anti-tank missiles – had been effectively wielded by Egyptian forces against the Israelis; but concluded that there was no new threat to NATO’s overall strategy. On the other hand, BND and Bundeswehr experts, after carefully inspecting the Soviet T-62 tanks that Israel had dispatched to the FRG in early 1974, decided to replace NATO’s 105-mm cannons with 120-mm smooth-bore cannons on the new Leopard II tanks, which entered service in 1979.

To be sure, the oil crisis put a brake on the FRG’s economic growth and intensified inflation and worker protests, although the harshest domestic effects would recede within six months. Despite the soaring price of oil – which rose fourfold between 1972 and 1974 – Germany’s robust exports – including its increased trade with the Arab countries and with Eastern Europe – made it one of the few Western governments to achieve a trade surplus in 1974, and its heavy industry quickly drew substantial OPEC petrodollar-investments.

The war’s principal impact on Germany was diplomatic and political. In foreign affairs, the further erosion of US-Soviet détente threatened the preparations for the CSCE. Also, Bonn’s spat with Washington took time to heal, and the FRG’s dispute with Paris over Europe’s direction greatly contributed to the EEC’s disarray during the oil crisis and also crushed the incipient deliberations over creating a freer European market with a single currency.

In the political realm, the war exacerbated Willy Brandt’s deteriorating political situation. Only one year after his spectacular electoral triumph and on the eve of his sixtieth birthday, the chancellor and SPD leader came under fire from disgruntled party comrades, workers, and

186 Vermerk für SS Dr. Mann, Nov. 12, 1973, BAF BW1/183469; also NATO report, n.d., ibid.
previously sympathetic journalists for having failed to institute the promised domestic reforms and for bowing too deeply to his FDP partners. Although Brandt’s personal popularity had not diminished, his critics termed him a weak leader whose key ministers were engaged in ruinous rivalries, whose cabinet meetings, run by consensus, were poorly prepared, and who was incapable of handling a serious international crisis.191

Finally, the fourth Arab-Israeli war heightened the already tense relationship between Bonn and Jerusalem. In December, in a modest display of friendship the Federal Republic dispatched three official delegations to Israel (including the attendees at Ben-Gurion’s funeral).192 Also, Puttkamer arranged visits by the Berlin Concert Choir and the Munich Kleine Komödie theater company: the first foreign artists to visit the war-scarred country.193

But the political rift between the two countries had further widened. Not only had the German foreign minister and chancellor’s resolve to “vote European” expanded the breach; the Bonn government’s ill-coordinated foray in 1973 into the complexities of Middle East politics—proclaiming the merits of its singular Ostpolitik but also insisting on its evenhanded stance and on the necessity of a Superpower-guaranteed solution—had alienated the Israeli government and population, adding to their sentiments of “irritation, misunderstanding, disappointment, and aversion.”194 And on the German side, despite the outpouring of popular sympathy at the outbreak of the October war, pro-Israeli sentiment swiftly plummeted in the difficult aftermath.195


Rumors of intra party conspiracies and of Brandt’s imminent resignation had already circulated before the October war. Moreover, the public reacted negatively to the chancellor’s departure for a Riviera vacation at the moment the full weight of the oil crisis descended on the country and to his delay in addressing the country on its impact. Merseburger, Willy Brandt, p. 712. In a Nov. 29 television interview, Brandt’s former partisan Günter Grass characterized the chancellor as “listless” and “dwelling in the clouds.” Ibid.


193 Puttkamer to AA, Jan. 16, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104783.

194 Weingardt, Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik, p. 235; also Hans Reif [the seventy five year old FDP luminary, deputy from Berlin, and president of the German Friends of the Hebrew University] to Genscher, Jan. 30, 1974, AdL N19/148, reporting the Israelis’ “feeling of desertion by the German Kulturwelt.”

195 Falling, according to an Allensbach Institut poll, from 57 percent in early October to 39 percent by November: Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Ergebnisse der empirische Forschung, 1946 1989 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1991), pp. 184, 200, n. 10.
Never before, since the establishment of the state, have the Israelis appeared as gloomy as now. They see themselves surrounded by enemies not only the Arabs but also from foreign lands such as Cuba and North Korea; and they have been displaced from Africa and abandoned by friends, even from the guilty Germans.  

Neither spiritually nor physically able to lead Europe, the Bonn government hovers anxiously between several foreign policy positions trying to get along with all parties.

As part of the “flood” of West German notables visiting Israel after the October war on February 9, 1974, the forty-seven-year-old SPD West Berlin mayor Klaus Schütz arrived at Lod Airport as a guest of the Israeli government. Widely regarded by Israelis as a “friendly and engaged” figure, Schütz in the early days of the war had participated in a pro-Israeli demonstration in his city, stirring strong Arab protests. Moreover, after becoming the youngest leader of the West’s Cold War showpiece in 1967, the pragmatic SPD politician (and close friend and colleague of Willy Brandt) had coolly confronted radical left-wing student protesters, led his city’s cultural, political, and economic revival, and also developed warm relations with the Jewish community.

2 Shlomo Aronson in Ha’aretz, Mar. 13, 1974.
3 Davar, Feb. 15, 1974.
Schultz’s five-day visit to Israel was replete with high moments for the mayor and his hosts. In Tel Aviv, where he was enthusiastically greeted by five hundred former Berliners (including the popular new mayor Shlomo Lahat, who addressed him in German), Schütz – evoking John F. Kennedy’s words before the Rathaus Schöneberg eleven years earlier – announced that he was also a “citizen of Israel” and that “the struggle for freedom and peace was identical for Israelis and West Berliners.” He also took time to visit a convalescent home for wounded Israeli soldiers.6

Schütz repeatedly stressed the links between his beleaguered city and Israel.7 In Beersheba, he visited the library of Ben-Gurion University, whose construction had been supported by the West Berlin senate and was named after Nobel Prize–winner S. Y. Agnon, who had lived in the former German capital during World War I. In Jerusalem, Schütz held political discussions with Eban and Meir and exchanged city portraits with mayor Teddy Kollek. In the formerly divided capital, Schütz delighted Israelis, drew more Arab protests, and stirred rebukes from Moscow and East Berlin by announcing to the local press, “The partition of cities is the wrong solution.”8

In the Aftermath of War

During the first half of 1974, international politics displayed this striking paradox: In contrast with Richard Nixon’s weakness at home, Henry Kissinger exerted an outsize US influence abroad, single-handedly leading the Middle East peace negotiations. But instead of a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, the US secretary of state launched a step-by-step process drawing in Israel and the moderate Arab regimes and concluding two key interim agreements, ending the Arab boycott against the United States and restoring diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt, Syria, and Algeria.9


Kissinger’s accomplishments were impressive. His crisis diplomacy, requiring five arduous trips to the Middle East, raised America’s stature and won plaudits at home. But there was also resistance to Washington’s domination of the diplomatic stage. France, stepping up its initiatives to develop European Middle East political and oil policies, opposed Kissinger’s management of the February Washington Energy Summit; and, despite the US secretary of state’s strong objections, France convinced the Nine to proceed with a Euro-Arab dialogue. The Kremlin dispatched Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to trail Kissinger on three largely unproductive missions to the Middle East; and profiting from the spike in oil and gas prices, Moscow dangled new deals with the energy-hungry West. Finally, China, America’s new, ostensibly anti-Soviet partner, suddenly adopted Mao’s Three World doctrine denouncing all forms of Great Power– and UN-intervention into local and regional conflicts.

Nixon, in the waning months of his presidency, did his utmost to underscore his diplomatic prowess and cement his historical legacy.

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In June, despite a serious physical ailment and the growing threat of impeachment, he was on the road for more than three weeks, conducting a triumphal tour of the Middle East, speaking at NATO’s headquarters in Brussels, and meeting with Brezhnev in Moscow. However, his administration had failed to heal the rift between Washington and its Western partners or to halt the backlash against détente in Congress and in the Pentagon, resulting in a major reduction in US-Soviet trade in 1974, the stalled Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) and Salt II negotiations, and a largely unproductive third summit.\(^\text{15}\)

On the Soviet side, Leonid Brezhnev also strove to salvage détente in order to block China and achieve his cherished diplomatic goal: the security pact ratifying the division of Germany and Europe that was languishing in Geneva. But Brezhnev’s conciliatory goals were undermined by Moscow’s heightened crackdown on Soviet dissidents and especially on the esteemed nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov.\(^\text{16}\) The February 13 expulsion of Alexander Solzhenitsyn (whose *Gulag Archipelago*, an exposé of the Soviet forced labor system dating back to the first years of the Bolshevik Revolution, had just been published abroad) also stirred the international human rights community.\(^\text{17}\)

Moreover, Moscow provoked Washington by courting the Arab refusal front – Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria, along with the Palestinians – and with its attempts to undermine Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy between Israel, Egypt, and Syria.\(^\text{18}\) But equally damaging to Brezhnev’s Western policy was the sudden loss of his two familiar

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European partners, Georges Pompidou, who died suddenly on April 4,\(^{19}\) and Willy Brandt, who resigned from his chancellorship on May 7.\(^{20}\)

**“The Earthquake”: Israel after the Elections**

The Israeli election results were announced on the first day of 1974. Eighty percent of the country had turned out to vote on December 31, and the outcome was not unexpected. Because a majority was unready to shed Israel’s current, if discredited, leadership, the Labor Alignment, with fifty-one seats, remained the largest party in the Knesset despite losing five seats; but its fiery opponent Likud, with thirty-nine seats, had gained seven.\(^{21}\)

Over the next two months, an ailing Meir, heading a caretaker cabinet, attempted to hold the fragmented Alignment together and strove to win over the obstreperous Dayan and the National Religious Party (NRP), who both demanded a coalition with Likud.\(^{22}\) Meir also faced a widespread eruption of veterans’ protests, led by two military heroes, who called for Dayan’s resignation and also for a more just and equitable Israeli society.\(^{23}\) Despite Meir’s success in forming a new government

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\(^{20}\) On the official Soviet view of Brandt, see V. D. Ezhov, “Ot kholodnoi voiny k razriadke i Sotrudnichestvu” [From the Cold War to détente and cooperation], *Novaja i Noveishaia Istoria* 3 (May 1974): 59–69.

\(^{21}\) *Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 2, 1974, termed the outcome “a grudging vote of confidence.”

\(^{22}\) Puttkamer to AA, Feb. 2, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104765. The NRP, Labor’s traditional ally, had changed from a dovish, religiously oriented party to a hawkish coalition whose younger members in the winter of 1974 had formed Gush Emunim [Block of the Faithful]: a militant neomessianic settlement movement opposed to any territorial concessions. Also, by insisting on an Orthodox definition of Judaism and demanding greater religious control over conversions, the NRP had made it difficult to add secular parties to the coalition. *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 1974, p. 12.


on March 8 – sealed by her last-minute threat to resign – most observers predicted a “rough road ahead.”

Israel’s somber mood was reinforced by a sharp decline in Soviet-Jewish immigration. Among the causes was not only Moscow’s backlash against US congressional pressure but also, on the part of Soviet Jews, their uncertainty over a replacement for Schönau and, possibly, their reluctance to enter a battle zone. With the near-disappearance of twenty- to forty-five-year-old Soviet immigrants, Israeli social welfare agencies were now burdened by an influx of aged immigrants and young children. Moreover, polls were now indicating that 12 percent of Israel’s population – almost half between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine – was thinking of leaving.

The war, which cost the country over $7 billion, had a shattering effect on the Israeli economy. Inflation had soared because of mounting government expenditures on arms, manpower, and veterans’ benefits. Israeli citizens were hit with forced loans, higher taxes, and double and triple price rises on basic necessities, along with heavily reduced services, transportation bottlenecks, and closed businesses and factories. US loans and grants, and contributions from overseas Jewish communities helped fill some of the financial gap, reaching 13.9 percent of Israel’s GNP after 1973.

Meir also faced a bleak diplomatic scene. Israel’s relations with the EEC remained cool; and Europe’s socialist leaders, now at the helm of six countries, were determined to play a more independent and “even-handed” role in Middle Eastern affairs. Eban’s hopes for

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26 Rückriegel to AA, Mar. 27, 1974 PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104769.

27 “Israel’s Economy Burdened by War,” New York Times, Jan. 27, 1974, p. 158; “Magere Kühe,” Der Spiegel 14 (Apr. 1, 1974), pp. 90 91. Because between 150,000 and 200,000 reservists remained on duty until Mar., there were major labor shortages in key industries and shuttered small firms and shops.


a resumption of ties with Moscow had not materialized; and, except for Romania, Israel had no official contacts with other Soviet-bloc governments.

Israel had become even more isolated from the rest of the world. Except for South Africa, which had provided open support during the October war, Israel was now estranged from nearly the entire African continent and from most of Asia and Latin America. Two earlier trade partners, Japan and Turkey, stung by the oil crisis and the Arab boycott, were also drifting away; a formerly friendly Australia had adopted a pro-Palestinian position; and Iran, once considered an unspoken ally, was now gravitating toward its Arab rivals.

The United States thus remained Israel’s indispensable diplomatic advocate as well as its sole military supplier; but under Kissinger’s direction, it had shifted to an honest-broker role in the Middle East conflict. Washington now viewed its generous aid to Israel as a prod to induce

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34 Turkey, although a NATO member, during the October war had forbidden the United States to use its military facilities to ship aid to Israel and US aircraft from flying over its territory, although it had allowed Soviet resupply aircraft heading for Egypt and Syria to use its airspace. *New York Times*, Oct. 25, 1973, p. 1; Mahmut Bali Aykan, “The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 97–98.


concessions, and its tiny client lacked the means to bargain with its powerful patron.\textsuperscript{37}

Thus Meir in her final months dutifully followed US direction, providing Kissinger with decisive – although not unlimited – control over the negotiations.\textsuperscript{38} Abandoning her unrealistic hopes for a formal peace treaty with Egypt – and also braving the protests of Begin and General Ariel Sharon (who had led the audacious Canal crossing the past October), Meir accepted the terms of “Sinai I” – the January 18, 1974, Disengagement Agreement – in which Israel for the first time withdrew from territory conquered in 1967. Not only would it evacuate the West Bank of the canal but it would also pull back some twenty kilometers from the East Bank, although the strategic Gidi and Mitla Passes stayed in its hands.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover, both sides agreed on the creation of a fourteen-member UN buffer force (UNEF) on both sides of the Suez Canal.\textsuperscript{40}

Pressed by Kissinger and Sadat, who was reluctant to be the sole Arab signatory with Israel, Meir also agreed to enter the far more difficult disengagement talks with Syria.\textsuperscript{41} Necessitating intense shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and Damascus by the dogged and energetic US secretary of state – and requiring pressure on two fragile governments and a last-minute Kissinger threat to withdraw – the Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Agreement was finally concluded

The following texts are references:

\textsuperscript{37} “We can’t say to the United States, ‘You won’t do this, so we will invite Gromyko to come.’ He won’t come, and we have no oil to stop pumping.” Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, p. 1046.

\textsuperscript{38} Excerpts from Meir’s Knesset speech, May 30, 1974, New York Times, May 31, 1974, p. 8; cf. Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, pp. 1078-79: “We had achieved our pivotal position because it was perceived that we alone could move Israel but also that this was a Herculean task. If it once appeared that we were prepared to break the back of our ally \textit{sic}, every later deadlock would be ascribed to lack of American determination. Israel might lash out in desperation. The Soviet Union would see a clear field for aggressive meddling”; also, earlier, pp. 483-84.

\textsuperscript{39} “Auf einer Piste zum Frieden?” Der Spiegel 6 (Feb. 2, 1974), p. 76; also Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, pp. 809-53; Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, pp. 141-43. Israel, according to Avi Shlaim, \textit{The Iron Wall}, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2014), p. 317, “made greater concessions in 1974 than those it had refused to make in return for an interim agreement in the first half of 1971. It is reasonable to suppose, though this can never be proved, that had Israel made these concessions in 1971 the Yom Kippur War could have been averted.”


\textsuperscript{41} “Naher Osten: Schwache Partner für Kissinger,” Der Spiegel 9 (Feb. 25, 1974), pp. 68-69, compares Meir’s fragile political situation with the challenges to Assad from Syria’s generals.

Six months after the October disaster and on the eve of her departure from office, Meir had achieved several significant diplomatic gains. Thanks to Kissinger’s whirlwind diplomacy, Israeli prisoners of war would be released; two of Israel’s borders were now far more secure; and, although no formal peace agreements had been concluded, Israel’s neighbors had tacitly accepted its existence. The Soviets had failed to revive the dormant Geneva talks; the Saudis had stood behind Kissinger’s efforts; and the Arab rejectionist regimes in Tripoli, Baghdad, and Algiers had not thwarted the accords with Egypt and Syria. Moreover, following the two Palestinian attacks inside Israel during the negotiations, not only had Assad privately assured Kissinger that terrorist acts would not be launched from his territory, but Meir had also received a written US acknowledgment of her country’s right to retaliate.\footnote{Henry Tanner, “A Pact That Could Reshape the Arab World,” \textit{New York Times}, June 1, 1974, p. 8; also Craig Daigle, \textit{The Limits of Detente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1969–1973} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 332–38; Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, pp. 151, 152; Klagsbrun, \textit{Lioness}, p. 667.}

Now, however, the Palestinian problem had moved to the forefront of the world stage and become a major diplomatic and security problem. Although the Palestinians had played no role in the October war, the fleeting prospect of a comprehensive Middle East peace conference – one that would lead to an Israeli return to its 1967 borders – had stirred the PLO’s demand for a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. In November 1973, both the Soviet Union and the Arab Summit Meeting in Algiers had recognized the PLO as the Palestinians’ official representative and called for its participation at the UN conference in Geneva. But the newly turned moderate Yasser Arafat was fiercely opposed by the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine, whose leader, George Habash, rejected negotiations with Israel and the creation of a truncated Palestinian state.\footnote{Paul Thomas Chamberlin, \textit{The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post Cold War Order} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 221–31.} On December 17, 1973, the struggle between rejectionists and moderates had erupted when five Palestinian
guerrillas — ostensibly hoping to sabotage the Geneva Conference – attacked a US airliner and hijacked a German plane at the Rome Airport, killing thirty-three people.46

Kissinger recognized the swell of international support for the Palestinian cause, especially among his potential Arab partners. However, the Rome assault — despite the condemnations by Arab leaders, including Arafat — reinforced his personal reluctance to include the Palestinians in the peace process.47 To be sure, although the Nixon administration had officially ignored the PLO, US intelligence operatives had over the past four years established informal contacts with Palestinian leaders in Beirut, and these had been considerably expanded during the tumultuous events of 1973.48

Nonetheless, the United States, which was closely allied with the pro-Western King Hussein, still officially advocated the West Bank’s return to Jordan, the PLO’s sworn enemy. In the winter of 1974, the king, hoping to preempt the PLO’s diplomatic offensive, had appealed to Israel for a withdrawal from the West Bank. But Meir, facing the mounting religious, nationalist, and strategic claims to the region, could only offer the establishment of a Jordanian civilian administration, which the king refused.49 And Kissinger, undoubtedly reluctant to add to his burdens by putting pressure on Israel, allowed this perhaps unrealizable opportunity to pass.50

47 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, pp. 624–27, According to Quandt, Kissinger had a “blind spot toward the Palestinians,” Peace Process, p. 173, “gear[ing] much of his diplomacy to trying to circumvent this crucial issue, to putting off the moment of truth, and to weakening the appeal of the Palestinian movement, all the while hoping that some alternative would appear.”
Nor did Meir seriously contemplate direct or indirect negotiations with the PLO, whose charter called for an armed struggle to liberate all of Palestine. Meir viewed Arafat’s acceptance of a ministate on the West Bank and Gaza as more a change of tactics than final aims. Moreover, the horrific attacks on Kiryat Shmona in April and on Ma’alot in May – although failing to halt the agreement with Syria – reinforced her resistance to treating with a terrorist organization and insistence that Washington shun the PLO.

In the midst of the Syrian negotiations, Israel faced another political crisis. On April 2, the five-member Commission of Inquiry, headed by Supreme Court president Shmuel Agranat, released an interim report on the background and early conduct of the October war, one for which the country had been manifestly unprepared because of blunders already acknowledged by the leadership. In the bluntest of language, the Agranat Commission castigated Israel’s intelligence services for refusing to credit the abundant reports of Egyptian and Syrian mobilization, thereby negating its obligation to provide advance warning of an imminent attack and resulting in a delayed and disorganized mobilization of the reserves; it censured the IDF leadership for the army’s unpreparedness; and it also criticized the government for relying on limited intelligence sources and having failed to create a crisis team to deal with emergencies. However, in its calls for disciplinary action, the commission recommended the dismissal of four top intelligence leaders and the IDF chief of staff, Lt.-General David Elazar; but it refused to assign direct responsibility either to Dayan or to Meir.

A public storm erupted over punishing Elazar, the valiant commander who had directed Israel’s resurgence during the war, but not the civilian

54 “Based on an ‘obdurate adherence’ to what was known as ‘the conception,’ according to which ‘Egypt would not launch war against Israel before she had first ensured herself of sufficient air power to attack Israel in depth,’ which . . . was not adequately reconsidered in view of . . . further information that reached the Director of Military Intelligence concerning the build up of enemy strength with additional armaments systems. This ‘conception’ had, therefore, in practice become obsolete.” “The Agranat Report,” p. 74.
chiefs under whom he had served. When Dayan refused to resign, Begin, seizing the moment, threatened a no-confidence motion that was expected to succeed and bring down the government. Meir, in the final act of her long political career, took charge. Responding to the protests of broad swaths of Israeli society as well as the defection of key Labor members, on April 10 she informed her party of her “irrevocable” decision to resign and a day later informed the Knesset, thereby bringing down the entire cabinet.

Israel – in the words of famed Israeli writer Moshe Shamir – had suddenly become a “headless” country. Along with Meir, Abba Eban, Pinhas Sapir, and Moshe Dayan – the last members of the Old Guard that had ruled for a quarter of a century – had been swept into the political wilderness, and a new generation prepared to take charge. Israel’s glum mood was expressed on April 25 in the subdued commemorations of its twenty-sixth anniversary but also in the thousand-person peace marches that passed through Jerusalem.

Meir lingered on for almost two months, heading another caretaker cabinet while the Labor Party elected her successor, the fifty-one-year-old former chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin, Israel’s first native-born prime minister, who formed a new government. In the meantime, she remained at the helm until the conclusion of the Disengagement Agreement with Syria, one whose terms have survived until the present.

Golda Meir’s critics have dealt harshly with her five years as prime minister, faulting her intransigency toward Sadat for provoking the 1973 war and her high-handed dismissal of the Palestinians’ national


58 “Israel: ‘Wir sind ein kopfloser Staat,’” Der Spiegel 17 (Apr. 22, 1974), pp. 100 18. Dayan, however, would reemerge three years later as foreign minister in Begin’s Likud government.


claims and also criticizing her lackluster domestic performance. But Meir’s resignation on April 10, ending a fifty-year-long political career, was a bold and courageous gesture, reflecting three of her lifelong traits: “her concern for Israel’s well-being, strength of will, and tough-minded realism.” By answering the popular clamor against a discredited government, she preserved her party’s hold on power, removing the recalcitrant Dayan and opening the way for new leadership. By staving off new elections, she gave her successor a chance to breathe life into Israel’s weakened ruling party; but the war hero and diplomat Rabin – less experienced in coalition maintenance, with an only narrow parliamentary majority, and faced with political infighting and a cooler relationship with Washington – made a shaky start and barely survived in office until his defeat in the May 1977 elections.

After resigning the Knesset, Golda Meir remained active as a public speaker, host to visiting dignitaries, best-selling memoirist, and energetic goodwill ambassador, doing her utmost to bolster her successor. Six months after her old enemy Begin became prime minister (with the defector Moshe Dayan as his foreign minister), Meir on November 19, 1977, was among the Israeli dignitaries to greet Anwar Sadat on his dramatic arrival in Jerusalem; but feisty as ever, she immediately condemned the Egyptian president for criticizing her earlier intransigency and also faulted Begin for his illusions.

West Germany: Spotlight on the Chancellor

Despite his substantial parliamentary majority, Willy Brandt had also faced a turbulent domestic scene in the beginning of 1974. With
a public disgruntled over rising inflation and unemployment, his approval rating had plunged to 33 percent.\textsuperscript{66} Returning from a two-week holiday in Bavaria, an exhausted and depressed Brandt once more contemplated resigning.\textsuperscript{67}

He nevertheless plunged into the fray.\textsuperscript{68} Seeking to fulfill one of his major campaign pledges, the chancellor on January 24 announced a hard-fought cabinet decision to increase workers’ voices in the management of large companies, although that decision failed to satisfy the SPD, the FDP, or the unions.\textsuperscript{69} The outcry was also swift from the CDU/CSU opposition and from German industry. Hanns Martin Schleyer, the new president of the Confederation of German Employers’ Associations, accused Brandt of threatening the country’s economic recovery by raising costs, inhibiting investment, and attempting to seize control over German industry.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} Speaking to his SPD comrades, Brandt termed Der Spiegel a “shit sheet” [Scheissblatt] for criticizing his endorsement of his FDP partner Walter Scheel’s bid to replace Heinemann as president in 1974: “Wie man Kredit verspielte,” Der Spiegel 4 (Jan. 21, 1974), pp. 17, 22.
\textsuperscript{69} New York Times, Jan. 25, 1974, p. 7; also “Mitbestimmung: Jetzt kommt’s zum Schwur,” Der Spiegel 9 (Feb. 25, 1974). The proposal, which was finally passed in 1976, increased from one third to nearly one half the number of the seats on the supervisory board of any company employing more than 2,000 workers, and affecting some 6 million workers in 670 companies. “New Parity Co Determination Act for West Germany,” European Industrial Relations Review (Apr. 1976): 9 10, 21 26.
\textsuperscript{70} In a speaking tour in April, Schleyer urged employers to resist the SPD led government, which he characterized as a “trade union state” beholden to the wishes of organized labor. “Die Solidarität der Unternehmer,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Apr. 8, 1974. Schleyer (b. 1915), who had studied law in Heidelberg, joined the SS on July 1, 1933, and the Nazi Party four years later. In 1943, after serving on the Western Front, he was appointed administrative chief of the Industrial Federation in Prague. After his release from Allied detention in 1948, Schleyer resumed his work as an economic administrator and leader of employer and industrial associations. However, because of his Nazi past and confrontational stance toward workers and radical students, Schleyer had also acquired a reputation as the “ugly capitalist.” New York Times, Oct. 20, 1977, p. 16. On Sept. 7, 1977, Schleyer was kidnapped by the RAF and, after the government refused to negotiate his release, was murdered on Oct. 18. The violent circumstances surrounding his death at the climax of the RAF violence made Schleyer a victim symbol in the FRG. Berliner Zeitung, June 24, 1997, “Hanns Martin Schleyer: das unbekannte Opfer,” Die Welt, Oct. 10, 2007, https://www.welt.de/politik/article1281029/Hanns_Martin_Schleyer_das_unbekannte_Opfer.html. “Entführung von Hanns Martin Schleyer,” Der Tagesspiegel, Sept. 5, 2017, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/entfuehrung_von_hanns_martin_schleyer_waren_sagen_die_raf_terroristen_heute/20286450.html.
In his last months in office Brandt’s inability to lead an increasingly polarized country had become evident. He not only lacked the temperament, vigor, and skills to manage his disjointed coalition government; he was also losing control over the SPD, whose mainstream politics were challenged by the Jusos. Veteran SPD members not only resented Brandt’s sympathy toward the radical left; they also faulted his deference to his coalition partner (for example, in promising the post of Scheel’s successor as foreign minister to Genscher over the far more experienced Helmut Schmidt), failing to remove conservative officials from the Auswärtiges Amt, and allowing the FDP to block their party’s reform program.

Brandt also faced a major challenge from the unions whose support was crucial to his party. In February, a crippling three-day strike by two million public service workers ended in a humiliating retreat by the Brandt government from its original pay offer. In the aftermath, there was an outbreak of wildcat strikes, raising fears of even greater inflation.

And there was more bad news in March when the SPD suffered major setbacks in three German state elections, its numbers dropping by 10 percent in its former stronghold of Hamburg, 5 percent in Rhineland-

71 “Willy Brandt: Ihr lasst mich alle allein,” Der Spiegel 8 (Feb. 18, 1974), pp. 20 23. On Jan. 15, the release of thirty million orange and black, 40 pfennig stamps marking the fifty fifth anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg’s murder became a cause célébre, producing two thousand protest letters to the minister for post and research Horst Ehmke and thousands of refusals to purchase them along with a swell of buyers aiming to demonstrate their liberal principles. New York Times, Mar. 10, 1974.


73 After the ailing Heinemann had decided not to seek a second term, Scheel in late December 1973 had announced his candidacy for the presidency.


75 The 11 percent pay raise exceeded the government’s original 9.5 percent offer and its 10 percent maximum terms but fell below the union’s initial 15 percent demand. “Streik: Wir sind keine impotent Freier,” Der Spiegel 6 (Feb. 4, 1974), pp. 19 26; New York Times, Feb. 14, 1974, p. 5.

Palatinate, and 7 percent in Schleswig-Holstein, demoralizing local party officials and causing mass defections. Moreover, the results left the CDU/CSU opposition with a narrow majority of seats in the Bundesrat, where it could delay government legislation.

Although local issues had played a crucial role in all three contests, Brandt’s foes targeted the chancellor as the principal cause of these damaging defeats. With another state election in Lower Saxony scheduled for June 9, there were rumors of a party coup to unseat the failing chancellor. Another sign of Brandt’s plummeting authority was the wide circulation of “Willy Jokes”, and for the second year, Alfred Tetzaff, the xenophobic character of the monthly television series *Ein Herz und eine Seele* (One Heart and One Soul) modeled on British and US sitcom portrayals of lower-middle-class bigots, continued to rant against the Sozis and their leader, “the cellar kid from Lübeck.”

After finance minister Helmut Schmidt castigated Brandt’s leadership in a televised broadcast, the chancellor moved to defang his detractors by planning a complete cabinet and party leadership shake-up in May after his return from North Africa. And on April 2 at the annual SPD party congress in Hanover, Brandt presented a forceful ten-point program upholding his moderate course and calling for party unity. But the


78 In a public blow to Brandt’s Ostpolitik, the Bundesrat in the beginning of Mar. rejected the recently signed normalization treaty with Czechoslovakia, requiring an additional act of approval by the Bundestag. *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 1974, p. 206.


83 Rückriegel to AA, Tel Aviv, Mar. 27, 1974, on Israeli press reporting of Brandt’s political difficulties, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104780; Baring and Görtemacher, *Machtwechsel*, pp. 702 8.

way ahead was impeded by obstacles: With the country scarred by the oil crisis and fears of inflation and unemployment – but also moved by a new environmental consciousness – any program to promote more economic justice while also protecting the population’s well-being required a strong and deft leader as well as a public consensus on means and goals, neither of which was present at the time.85

Brandt also faced difficulties in his foreign policy. Ostpolitik was stalled, its benefits decreasingly palpable to the German public.86 There was a host of lingering problems, from regulating transit to West Berlin to a new dispute with Pankow and Moscow over placing the Federal Environmental Agency in the walled-in city.87 During his unusually long eleven-day visit to the Soviet Union in late February and early March, Egon Bahr failed to achieve a breakthrough on the political representation of West Berlin, and Soviet leaders expressed resentment of the paltry progress of Osthandel.88 Both sides hoped that the Brandt visit that summer would iron out the difficulties.
There were lingering tensions with the United States, some left over from the October 1973 dispute but also new ones, including strong pressure from Washington to conclude a new offset agreement under the threat of reducing US troops in Germany. With NATO approaching its twenty-fifth anniversary in June (and the CSCE talks stalled), Bonn fretted over Kissinger’s critical stance toward America’s European allies. The secretary of state’s blunt address in Brussels on March 4 made Brandt’s mediating efforts between Paris and Washington all the more difficult, dividing his coalition government and inciting his pro-US CDU/CSU critics. Moreover, as the rotating president of the EEC, the FRG bore the brunt of US resentment over the French-promoted Euro-Arab dialogue, which, Nixon insisted, had excluded any consultation with Washington and threatened to interfere with Kissinger’s Middle East peacemaking efforts.

Moreover, the European Community, only one year after the euphoria over its first enlargement, was now in crisis. The Nine, all suffering varying degrees of economic woes, were tackling these independently instead of collectively. France and Britain had already broken ranks by seeking special arrangements with the Arab oil producers. Yet despite their divisions, the EEC also refused to set up regular transatlantic

90 Brandt Kissinger meetings, Mar. 3, 4, 1974, Scheel Kissinger meeting, Mar. 4, 1974, AAPD 1974 1:283 86.
93 France, for example, after only a perfunctory notification to Bonn, in the beginning of the year had exited from the joint float of the community’s currencies. “A Blow to Europe,” New York Times, Jan. 23, 1974, pp. 45, 50; also “For Europe the Alliance Is Strained,” ibid., Jan. 27, 1974, p. 161; “Another Decline of the West,” ibid., Apr. 13, 1974, p. 25.
consultations to appease Washington and, ignoring US and Israeli protests, was determined to proceed with the Euro-Arab dialogue.94

Brandt also faced the loss of his two principal European partners, Heath and Pompidou: Britain under the new Harold Wilson government, formed on March 4, was proposing a renegotiation of its EEC membership,95 and following Pompidou’s unexpected death on April 2, France’s diplomatic direction had suddenly become uncertain.96 Consequently, the chancellor’s ambitious plans for “more Europe” – for a stronger European Council in Brussels, for a European constitution, and for a directly elected parliament in Strasbourg – all had to be placed on hold.97

Brandt’s last foreign policy initiatives were aimed at improving Bonn’s relations with the Arab world, where there were also significant obstacles. At his meeting on January 16, 1974, with the oil ministers of Algeria and Saudi Arabia, Brandt acknowledged the “historic burden” that tied the FRG to Israel. Moreover, referring to the formulation of the 1970 Moscow Treaty, he insisted that as a divided country West Germany was unwilling to endorse any declaration on the inviolability of state borders.98 But reprising the two other principles of his Ostpolitik, the chancellor affirmed his renunciation of violence to alter frontiers and his insistence on peaceful change; moreover, Brandt avowed his country’s support of peace negotiations between the parties, Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, and a just solution to the Palestinian problem.99

98 “Sovereign states must remain free to change or cancel their borders by mutual agreement.” Résumé of the meeting lasting an hour and a quarter in Sanne, Vermerk, Jan. 17, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104956.
99 Scheel to Yamani, Jan. 30, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104956, reiterated Brandt’s message. The two emissaries, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, Saudi Arabia’s minister of petroleum and mineral resources, and Sayed Belaid Abdesselam, Algeria’s minister of energy and industry, were touring various Western capitals on behalf of OAPEC in order to present the Arab point of view on the embargo. Middle East Economic Survey 17, no. 2 (Nov. 2, 1973), pp. 4 5.
In dealing with his interlocutors, Brandt had three additional cards to play. As an important potential trade and investment partner, Bonn remained an attractive collaborator with the Arab world.\footnote{“Stahl in der Wüste,” Der Spiegel 4 (Jan. 22, 1974), p. 26, recounts discussions between Arab oil minister Yamani, Algerian oil minister Abd el Salam, and German industrialists during their visit to Bonn.}
The chancellor also underlined the Euro-Arab dialogue and the EEC’s aim to offset the Superpowers’ domination of the Middle East.\footnote{Vermerk, Jan. 31, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104956; also Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 16, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12.} But Brandt insisted that the Federal Republic, with its extensive fuel reserves and prospective import arrangements with Iran and Soviet Russia, was immune to any form of political blackmail.\footnote{Fiona Venn, The Oil Crisis (London: Pearson, 2002).}

Between April 19 and April 24, Willy Brandt embarked on another historic journey: the first Western statesman to visit Algeria since its independence twelve years earlier, and the first German chancellor ever to visit Egypt.\footnote{As West Berlin mayor Brandt, on his eighteen day, ten nation African tour in Nov. 1963, had already visited both countries and met with their then leaders Ahmed Ben Bella and Gamal Abdel Nasser.} The trip took place at a highly opportune moment. Kissinger, after concluding the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, had been away for almost two months but was preparing to return on April 28 to launch the disengagement talks between Syria and Israel. Gromyko, absent from the region since March, did not return until early May. Thus, the German chancellor, representing his country and Europe, had the stage to himself; but conspicuously, as in his visit to Israel a year earlier, Brandt’s small entourage of diplomats included no economic or financial officials.\footnote{“Kanzlerreise: Watte in Anzug,” Der Spiegel 16 (Apr. 15, 1974), pp. 24–25; also see Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 14, 1974, ISA 130 4573/6; Morizet to FMAE, Apr. 19, 1974, FMAE Europe 1971 76/Communautés Européennes/Moyen Orient 3804.}

In Algiers, Brandt’s host was the forty-two-year-old president Houari Boumedienne, who was also the current secretary-general of the Non-Aligned Movement.\footnote{An aspiring international figure, Boumedienne had dispatched the five Arab representatives to the EEC’s Copenhagen meeting in Dec. and his Industry and Energy Minister Belaid Abdesselam on the tour of Western capitals, and, on Jan. 30, responding to the US sponsored oil consumers’ conference to be held in Washington, had called for a special UN session to deal with the energy crisis, which met between Apr. 9 and May 3, 1974. New York Times, Feb. 2, 1974, p. 6.} Ten days earlier, in a stirring speech delivered in Arabic before the United Nations General Assembly, Boumedienne had appealed for a “New International Economic Order” to redress the disparities between the rich Western industrialized nations...
and the Third World.\textsuperscript{106} Algeria was also a key player in Middle East affairs, which, along with Libya, strongly supported the Palestinian cause.\textsuperscript{107} But although Boumedienne had helped finance the Egyptians and Syrians during the October war, unlike his hard-line neighbor he was prepared to recognize Israel’s existence in return for its full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories.\textsuperscript{108} Last, the former revolutionary had an ambitious domestic program: With revenues from the nationalized oil industry having more than tripled between 1973 and 1974 (and estimated at $4 billion in 1974), Boumedienne was intent on launching major industrial and infrastructure projects to raise his country’s stature and living standards; these, however, required Western experts, technology, and investments.\textsuperscript{109}

Brandt received a gala welcome in Algiers, including a warm embrace from his host and a twenty-one-gun salute.\textsuperscript{110} But his three meetings with Boumedienne were formal and inconclusive. The two agreed on the need to curtail Superpower domination and erase the political and economic barriers between Europe and North Africa; but Brandt declined to offer his or the EEC’s services as mediator in the Middle East, to make specific commitments on behalf of the FRG for economic assistance, or to accept Boumedienne’s stark division of the world into haves and have-nots. In their three meetings, Brandt repeatedly cautioned his exigent host that major goals required “gradual [\textit{schrittweise}] solutions” and that “change, always a difficult process, required both patience and toughness.”\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{106} New York Times, Apr. 11, pp. 1, 12, Apr. 12, p. 3. The next day, Boumedienne traveled to Washington and met with Nixon and Kissinger, to prepare for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, which had been severed in 1967. Paul Balta, “Boumédiènne: Nationaliste et Tiers Mondiste,” Maghreb Review 26, no. 1 (2001): 64 74.


\textsuperscript{108} Algeria had also failed to strictly follow the economic boycott against Israel. Walter Henry Nelson and Terence C. F. Prittie, The Economic War against the Jews (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 45. And breaking with its rejectionist neighbor, at the OAPEC meeting, Algeria had agreed to treat the Federal Republic as a “friendly” country and provisionally lift the oil embargo against the United States because of Kissinger’s peace initiatives. Bo Heinebäck, Oil and Security (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), pp. 29, 122 23.


\textsuperscript{111} Quotes from first Brandt Boumedienne meeting, Apr. 19, 1974, Aufzeichnung, Apr. 21, 1974, AdsD WBA A9/26; the second, Apr. 20, 1974, Aufzeichnung, Apr. 21,
In Egypt, Brandt encountered an even more imposing leader in Anwar Sadat, the man who had evicted the Soviets in 1972, started a war a year later, and afterward concluded the first agreement between an Arab state and Israel. Once more Brandt received a warm greeting, ending the chill between the two countries since September 1972 when Egypt had refused his appeal to allow the Palestinians and their Israeli hostages to fly to Cairo and to ensure the captives’ safety. Two

years after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the Egyptian leader was impatient for substantial economic and technical assistance.\footnote{One Egyptian newspaper hailed Brandt as “one of the few leaders who could not be blackmailed by the Zionists.” \textit{New York Times}, Apr. 22, 1974, p. 3.}

The Brandt-Sadat conversations, wide ranging and candid, covered their diverse experiences with Washington and Moscow, the divisions within the Arab world, and the current economic and political problems of the EEC. But in contrast with his very general talks with Boumedienne, the chancellor proposed a joint commission with Egypt to promote bilateral political, economic, and cultural ties and expressed strong support for the forthcoming Euro-Arab dialogue. Yet despite Sadat’s appeals, Brandt was vague about Bonn’s and Europe’s potential contributions to Middle East peace.\footnote{Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Brandt mit Präsident Sadat in Kairo, Apr. 22, 1974, AAPD 1974 2:544 48. Two other meetings on Apr. 21 and Apr. 22, ibid., pp. 530 35. In Cairo, Brandt also met on Apr. 22 with Mahmoud Riad, general secretary of the Arab League, ibid., pp. 540 43. See also, Brandt, \textit{Über den Tag hinaus}, pp. 166 67; Benjamin Steel, “Brandts Nahostpolitik,” \textit{Das Parlament} 16 17 (2014), http://www.das parlament.de/2014/16 17/Kehrseite/50609874/327236. In late Feb. 1974, Brandt was similarly noncommittal in his discussion with the visiting Libyan prime minister Abdessalam Jalloud. \textit{Der Spiegel} 10 (Mar. 4, 1974), p. 23.} Neither a supplicant nor a major Middle East player, Willy Brandt’s journey to Algeria and Egypt had advanced his country’s position in the Arab world without raising US suspicions of a new rival in the region.\footnote{Falín to Gromkyo, Bonn, Apr. 29, 1974, AVP RF 757/19/107/31; A. J. M. Craig to FCO, Bonn, May 3, 1973, GB NA FCO 93/531.}

Brandt’s achievement was short lived. Upon returning to Bonn on April 24, he faced the startling news of the arrest of his aide, Günter Guillaume, as an East German spy.\footnote{In 1974, Germany’s trade with the Middle East and North Africa rose 76.2 percent, and that year diplomatic relations were reestablished with Iraq and Syria. Nonetheless, Brandt continued to insist on his country’s resistance to economic blackmail. In his meeting with Boumedienne, he underplayed his country’s oil dependency, stressing the FRG’s sound economic status, alternative energy supplies, and conservation efforts.} The timing, just six weeks before the crucial Lower Saxony elections (and only one week before the
opening of the GDR’s diplomatic office in Bonn) was disquieting.\textsuperscript{117}

Even more disconcerting were the press reports of the largest espionage case in the country’s history: the planting of an enemy agent at the center of state power. These were blows not only to Brandt’s Ostpolitik and to the country’s security but also to the chancellor’s judgment and leadership.\textsuperscript{118}

Brandt strove initially to minimize the damage; indeed, the FRG had long been the primary target of the GDR’s espionage.\textsuperscript{119} In his brief statement to the Bundestag on April 26, Brandt expressed disappointment in his aide’s betrayal and distaste for East Berlin’s tactics but also exuded an air of confidence that the crisis would pass.\textsuperscript{120}

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\textsuperscript{117} The arrest, in fact, occurred at that time because Guillaume, tipped off by his East German handlers, was about to escape, although the authorities had not yet assembled an airtight legal dossier against the spy. “Fall Guillaume,” \textit{Der Spiegel} 18 (Apr. 29, 1974), pp. 21 22. In response to the GDR’s espionage, Brandt ordered a delay in opening its office until the end of May.

\textsuperscript{118} “Fall Guillaume,” \textit{Der Spiegel} 18 (Apr. 29, 1974), p. 29. At the time the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimated that there were eleven thousand East German spies in the FRG, in every political party, local council, and state chancellery, in industry, the unions, and even in the Bundeswehr. Details in Wolf, \textit{Man without a Face}, pp. 68 82, 94ff.


This same parliamentary session also witnessed a heated eighteen hour debate, broadcast over national television, on the highly controversial issue of legalizing abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. Facing strong religious opposition, Brandt delivered a lengthy, carefully prepared defense of his government’s support for
However, the shadows failed to dissipate. Contrary to Brandt’s public assurances, security officials had evidence of Guillaume’s access to secret documents during his summer trip to Norway with the Brandt family, stirring criticism by the CDU/CSU opposition of the government’s lax security arrangements.¹²¹ And because of the spy’s almost daily contact with the chancellor, during its investigation the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) had assembled an extensive dossier with details of Brandt’s private life that would no doubt be exposed at Guillaume’s trial.¹²²

Brandt, who took almost two weeks to come to a decision, still hoped to stay on.¹²³ However, in the meantime the two most culpable officials, the president of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution Günter Nollau and interior minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, both of whom had countenanced leaving Guillaume at the chancellor’s side for almost an entire year without offering sufficient security or arresting the spy, refused to resign.¹²⁴ Moreover, although Brandt’s closest colleagues as well as his coalition partner, Walter Scheel, urged him to remain, one of the SPD’s three dominant figures, Herbert Wehner, alarmed over the potential political damage from the private dossier, on May 4 gave the chancellor a deadline, offering his support but without encouraging him

a woman’s right to choose. Brandt, Erinnerungen, p. 170. Passed by an extremely narrow (247 243) vote with nine abstentions and two cabinet members voting no, ibid., StenBer, pp. 6470 6505; New York Times, Apr. 27, 1974, p. 6), the legislation was struck down ten months later by the Constitutional Court as inconsistent with human rights and replaced with a much weaker bill in 1976.

¹²¹ New York Times, Apr. 27, 1974, p. 9. Although, it turned out, none of these reached East Berlin because Christel Guillaume’s courier, fearing she was being followed, dropped the documents into the Rhine: Merseburger, Willy Brandt, pp. 724 25; Wolf, Man without a Face, pp. 158 60.

¹²² Binder, The Other German, p. 341, Merseburger, Willy Brandt, pp. 732 34. Guillaume’s boss, who had also obtained this private information, denied any intention to blackmail Brandt, insisting that contrary to his design (which was to gain access to sensitive FRG and NATO materials), the chancellor had been forced out by “intraparty intrigue.” Wolf, Man without a Face, pp. 168 71.

¹²³ Baring and Görtemaker, Machtwechsel, pp. 733 62. Brandt’s physical condition, both a stomach ailment contracted during his trip in North Africa and two infected teeth that had to be extracted, added to his difficulty. Brandt, Erinnerungen, p. 319.

¹²⁴ Baring and Görtemaker, Machtwechsel, pp. 735 36; Binder, The Other German, pp. 334 35, 339. Each in his memoir faulted the other: Nollau, in Das Amt: 50 Jahre Zeuge der Geschichte (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1978), pp. 255 71, accused Genscher of refusing to take the charges against Guillaume seriously; and in Erinnerungen, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), pp. 197 202, Genscher (the foreign minister designate, whose resignation would have thrown the SPD FDP coalition into turmoil) criticized Nollau’s dilatory behavior.

Another target of criticism, Brandt’s former chief of staff, Horst Ehmke (who, despite Bahr’s warning, had hired the unqualified and suspect Guillaume), did offer to resign his cabinet post, but Brandt refused: Mittendrin: Von der Grossen Koalition zur Deutschen Einheit (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994), pp. 238 40.
to stay on.\textsuperscript{125} Not insignificantly, Brandt was reluctant to pay the price of exposing his private affairs in order to remain in office.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, a combination of his experience as chancellor and his sense of political responsibility (“the unwritten rules of democracy”) as well as his personal honor drove Brandt’s difficult choice.\textsuperscript{127}

On May 6, in a brief handwritten letter to President Heinemann, Willy Brandt acknowledged his “negligence in connection with the Guillaume espionage affair,” and he resigned.\textsuperscript{128} The timing was in fact essential. Brandt’s self-sacrificing gesture not only bolstered his disjointed party’s wounded stature; it also cemented the fractious SPD/FDP alliance that had governed Germany since 1969, ensuring Scheel’s presidential victory on May 23, Genscher’s accession to the foreign ministry in the new


\textsuperscript{126} Despite widespread observations of Brandt’s fatigue and depression caused by his prolonged political battles and his \textit{Amtsmüdigkeit} (Binder, \textit{The Other German}, pp. 326 28, 346 47; Merseburger, \textit{Willy Brandt}, p. 738), there is equally strong evidence that he was ready to fight: Baring and Görtemaker, \textit{Machtwechsel}, pp. 740 43. Potentially adding to this decision was the fact that Helmut Schmidt, Brandt’s longtime colleague and rival, was well prepared to succeed him, making the transition a smooth one. Binder, \textit{The Other German}, p. 351, Baring and Görtemaker, \textit{Machtwechsel}, p. 739.


Schmidt cabinet, and the coalition’s retaining a slender majority in the crucial June 9 Lower Saxony state elections.\footnote{129}

Brandt’s unexpected departure shook his country, Europe, and the entire world.\footnote{130} In his five years in office, his personality and his politics had transformed the face of Germany at home and abroad.\footnote{131} Observers anticipated changes under his successor.\footnote{132} Helmut Schmidt, more resistant to the Jusos’s pressure, would restrain their demands for major domestic reforms and, as a less enthusiastic Ostpolitiker and Europeanist (although also a lukewarm Transatlantiker), he would make significant changes in Bonn’s diplomacy.\footnote{133}

But Schmidt’s former chief and rival also maintained a vigorous and influential political afterlife. Brandt, who remained head of the SPD until 1987, between 1976 and 1992 served as president of the Socialist International, and between 1979 and 1983 was also a member of the directly elected European Parliament.\footnote{134} One of his notable post-chancellor ventures occurred in 1977 when – responding to World Bank president Robert McNamara’s invitation and returning to Boumedienne’s appeal for a new international economic order – Brandt agreed to chair the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, which, three years later, produced the world’s first comprehensive study of the global North-South crisis.\footnote{135}

\footnote{129} Brandt, Über den Tag hinaus, p. 180; on the national and international importance of this vote, preventing a larger CDU/CSU majority in the Bundesrat enabling them to block national legislation: New York Times, June 12, 1974, p. 44; “Rütteln am roten Riegel,” Der Spiegel 25 (June 17, 1974), pp. 21 22.


\footnote{132} Ben Ari to FM, May 12, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12; Falin to Gromyko, June 24, 1974, AVP RF 757/19/107/31.


\footnote{134} Merseburger, Willy Brandt, pp. 739 803.

\footnote{135} Willy Brandt, North South: A Programme for Survival (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980); Brandt, Erinnerungen, pp. 375 88. The seventeen member commission, representing North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, excluded Communist
Both Meir and Brandt had been disserved by their secret services, their party colleagues, and their coalition partners. When major scandals had rocked their countries, both relinquished their leadership positions based on principled stances of responsibility. Both were charismatic figures, powerful communicators, and adept with the media; both had linked their careers with the labor movement, socialism, and left-wing internationalism; and both were replaced by younger, more pragmatic successors. Both Meir and Brandt in their different ways were also outsiders who had striven doggedly for high levels of achievement but had also displayed high levels of self-protectiveness, surrounding themselves with a close circle of intimate friends as a shield against their ubiquitous critics.136

Here the comparisons stop. One had led a tiny beleaguered country in the Middle East; the other, two-thirds of a divided, heavily fortified country in the middle of Europe. In their domestic politics, Meir was a party stalwart, while Brandt was always independent from his comrades; the grandmotherly Meir admired Israeli youth from a distance, while Brandt identified with Germany’s left-wing radicals. In their diplomacy they were also different: Meir clung to the status quo as providing the best protection for Israel, while Brandt was a dedicated agent of change to bring about a better German future. The prime minister insisted on direct negotiations with Israel’s enemies without offering any compromises, while the chancellor, who had negotiated with the FRG’s foes, paid a substantial political price for his Ostpolitik. Moreover, within the détente era of the Cold War in which both leaders operated, Meir had placed her country squarely under Washington’s command and tutelage, while Brandt, wielding Germany’s considerable economic power, sought to build a robust European Economic Community that would eventually be independent from Superpower control.137

137 Compton to FCO, Bonn, Apr. 24, 1974, GB NA FCO 93/129.

Epilogue: Whither the West German–Israeli relationship?

During the final months of Golda Meir’s and Willy Brandt’s rule, West German–Israeli relations were particularly disjointed. Both governments were deeply absorbed in domestic politics and also in their separate foreign policy concerns: The FRG focused on stabilizing the EEC and dealing with the Arab world, while Israel was dominated by the US peace initiatives.

Several old elements remained. One was the procession of German visitors to Israel.\(^\text{138}\) Among them was the former CDU opposition leader Rainer Barzel who, as a guest of the foreign ministry, presented a somber evaluation of the current state of their bilateral relations to Israeli leaders.\(^\text{139}\) More reassuring were Hans Koschnick and Horst Ehmke, who arrived on the eve of Brandt’s North African journey.\(^\text{140}\) Another carryover was the willingness of German officials to apprise Israeli diplomats of their discussions with Arab emissaries.\(^\text{141}\) Trade between the two countries had expanded considerably, and cultural relations were finally resumed after the 1973 war.\(^\text{142}\)

But old difficulties persisted, especially Israeli suspicions of the pro-Arab leanings of the Auswärtiges Amt and its chief Walter Scheel.\(^\text{143}\) Underlining the inconsistencies between the German chancellor and his foreign minister, Ben-Horin was incensed over Scheel’s January 30 letter to the two Arab oil ministers, which had exceeded the EEC’s November declaration (but was eventually repu-
diated by Brandt). Despite Bahr’s reassurances, Ben-Horin also fretted over Brandt’s meeting with Egyptian leader Sadat. And the Israeli embassy was irate over Bonn’s refusal to condemn the Palestinian attack on Kiryat Shmona in April.

Israelis were sensitive to the new mood in Bonn. Behind the primarily sober Israeli press reports of the launching of the Euro-Arab dialogue, Brandt’s visits to North Africa, and the chancellor’s demisison – all given far less coverage than Kissinger’s activities – there was a nervous public. Thus, following Brandt’s resignation, there was an explosion of outrage over the arrest and sentencing of Nazi-hunter Beate Klarsfeld. Israelis recognized Bonn’s unreceptiveness to evocations of the Nazi past. In an atmosphere of economic stringency, Nahum Goldmann made no headway with German officials to obtain a new restitution agreement, which would take another five years to conclude.

In the late spring of 1974, the sudden departures of Meir and Brandt ended a five-year struggle over defining the West German–Israeli relationship. Although some Israelis still believed that the Federal Republic owed their country unconditional support in answering vital questions, these vital questions were now subject to different interpretations. Bonn’s search for balance in its Middle East policies had been greatly complicated by the October war and the emergence of the Palestinian question; but even

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144 Ben Horin to FM, Mar. 20, n.d., Mar. 27, Apr. 16, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12; also Niemöller to Frank, Mar. 27, 1974, Puttkamer to AA, Apr. 3, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104596, Apr. 4, 9, 1974, ibid., 104775.

145 Ben Horin to FM, Apr. 18, 1974, ISA 130 4573/6. In an effort to allay Ben Horin’s suspicions, Bahr revealed Kissinger’s appeal to Brandt for a “more substantial” West German economic involvement in Egypt. See Kissinger to Brandt, Apr. 13, 1974, AdsD WBA A9/20; also Puttkamer to AA, May 10, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104597.

146 Ben Ari to FM, Apr. 18, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12; Ben Horin to FM, Apr. 18, ibid., 4573/6.

147 Rückriegel to AA, Mar. 11, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104596; Puttkamer to AA, Apr. 22, 26, 28, 1974, ibid., 104775, May 10, 1974, ibid., 104957.

148 Klarsfeld, seized on April 17 during an anti Nazi demonstration at Dachau and charged with attempting to kidnap former Gestapo chief Kurt Lishka two years earlier, was sentenced on July 9 to two months in prison. Jerusalem Post, May 17, 1974; Puttkamer to AA, July 3, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104770; New York Times, July 10, 1974, p. 43; Puttkamer to AA, Sept. 20, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104780. On May 2, a special session of the Knesset appointed a committee that called for Klarsfeld’s release as a “moral obligation of the Bonn government.” Lavon to Bonn embassy, ISA 130 6817/12.

149 Ya’covy to FM, Feb. 6, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12, Feb [?], 1974, ibid., 4573/6; May 12, 1974, ibid., 6817/12.

150 Rückriegel to AA, Mar. 24, 1974, PA AA 104780. In a February poll, 59 percent of the West German population preferred no involvement at all in the Arab Israeli conflict. INFAS [Instituts für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft], Bonn Bad Godesberg, Feb. 12, 1974, PA AA Zwischenarchiv 104956.
earlier, Brandt’s European agenda had already altered its ties with Israel, providing a firm basis for evenhandedness in the Israeli-Arab conflict.  

Meir and Brandt’s successors, operating in a changed domestic and international environment, intended to move in another direction, one that was less “emotional,” more businesslike, and less fraught by the debate over the presence of the past.

152 Ben Ari to FM, May 12, 1974, ISA 130 6817/12; also Weingardt, Deutsche Israel und Nahostpolitik, pp. 240–42.
Conclusions

In tracing the history of West German–Israeli relations between 1965 and 1974, this book has pointed out not only major irritants and disruptions but also elements of cooperation and conciliation.

Not surprisingly, the Third Reich’s annihilation of European Jewry was the underlying foundation, one that successive Bonn governments sought to underplay but to which the Israeli government gave prominence. Between 1967 and 1968 the relationship was transformed by the emergence of two distinctive national directions: Israel’s shaped by its overwhelming victory in the June 1967 war, its occupation of Arab lands, and its unsuccessful efforts to achieve peace with its neighbors; and the FRG’s, marked by its decision to pursue a realist placatory diplomacy – its Ost- and Nahostpolitik – toward the Communist and Arab worlds and its emergence as an economically-strong, politically-influential power in Europe and the world.

Earlier, during the decade and a half between 1952 and 1965 the West German–Israeli tie had developed within a bipolar Cold War world. This largely top-down, unofficial connection, managed by the two countries’ elites, had a moral and historical dimension. It was influenced by the FRG’s goals of not only anchoring itself firmly in the Western camp and appeasing German nationalist aspirations with the Hallstein doctrine but also refusing to risk its relations with the Arabs by exchanging ambassadors with Israel. Israel, although benefiting from the Bonn government’s generous secret loans and arms, was also an aloof partner, a critic of West Germany’s failure to prosecute war criminals and discipline its rocket scientists working in Egypt, and a staunch opponent of establishing cultural ties and expanding its citizens’ contacts with the Federal Republic.

Everything changed in 1965. The FRG, now the world’s third-largest exporter, sought to increase its diplomatic stature but was hemmed in by its rivalry with the GDR. Out of the diplomatic crisis that year – the threat
of Egyptian recognition of its reviled Communist neighbor – the Bonn government made the startling decision to cease arms deliveries and grant diplomatic recognition to Israel.

For the Israeli side, the establishment of formal relations produced a mixed result. Bonn’s decision to become the eighty-eighth state to send an emissary to Tel Aviv represented a substantial diplomatic victory for Israel, refuting Arab charges of the irregularity of its existence. But the cessation of the arms deliveries and unencumbered loans and Israel’s exposure to increased resistance by West German officialdom and scrutiny by the press ushered in a more contentious stage. There were also embarrassing public events, including the riots upon Ambassador Rolf Pauls’s arrival in 1965 and the acerbic Adenauer-Eshkol exchange in May 1966.

The June 1967 war was a major watershed. West Germany, confronting Arab threats to Israel, responded sympathetically to its small endangered partner. Although the Federal Republic was officially neutral, its leaders denied a “neutrality of the heart,” sent gas masks to protect Israelis, and countenanced mass fund-raising efforts and the recruitment of volunteers. Large sections of the West German public were relieved over Israel’s victory over its Soviet-armed Arab enemies.

However, in the war’s aftermath, the Bonn government was thrust for the first time into Middle East politics, which it viewed through the lens of its own national interests: to break down the Cold War deadlock in Europe and regain its place in the Arab world on which it was dependent for oil and trade. Disgruntled by the Superpowers’ failure to prevent the war or forge a peace (which they had accomplished in 1956), but unable to play a major role, the FRG adopted a neutral stance between Israel and its Arab antagonists, acknowledging the special burden of the German past but also offering support to the new war victims, the Palestinian refugees.

There was also a public dimension to the shift after the June 1967 war. West Germany’s extreme left- and right-wing press and its burgeoning youthful protestors began protesting Israeli “imperialism” and championing the Palestinian cause. Augmenting the anti-Jewish sentiments of the older population, this resulted in a diminution of popular support for Israel. Israel, although expressing gratitude for Bonn’s moral and material support, also recognized – and increasingly resented – the shift in official and public sentiment.

Another major turning point occurred in 1969 with the onset of US-Soviet détente. The Superpowers, although achieving the first steps toward nuclear disarmament and producing a Berlin settlement, failed to avert two more Middle East wars or to contain the explosion
of Palestinian terrorism. Moreover, the turmoil in the global economy – from America’s abandoning the gold standard in 1971 to the oil crisis of 1973 – ushered in a period of inflation and domestic disorder.

Within this global framework, West Germany and Israel occupied strikingly different positions. The Federal Republic, which had become an economically strong, politically stable regional power, was protected by its NATO and EEC memberships and after 1969 was linked by treaties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and subsequently with the entire Arab world.

Israel, on the other hand, although the strongest military power in the Middle East (likely bolstered by its nuclear capability), had a far smaller population, a huge defense burden, and unwieldy coalition governments; and despite increasing US political and military support, it lacked official allies, grew increasingly estranged from Europe, and was beset by Communist and Third World critics in the United Nations.

The contrasts between West Germany and Israel grew starker after 1969. For Chancellor Willy Brandt, leading a left-liberal coalition, removing the stain of Auschwitz and creating a strong German future necessitated not only more democracy at home but also a conciliatory policy toward his Communist neighbors and the Third World. Intent on lessening Bonn’s dependency on the United States, Brandt was also an ardent European, who intended to buttress his Ost- and Nahostpolitik by strengthening the European Economic Community and voting European in world forums.

Israel, led by Golda Meir, viewed Brandt’s innovations with suspicion and apprehension. Despite her anti-German sentiments, Meir tried to revitalize the German–Israeli bond through personal encounters and frequently deferred to Bonn’s interests. Nonetheless, there was a fundamental difference between Brandt’s worldview and Meir’s, which created a barrier between the two. One side advocated a policy of appeasement and sacrifice in order to promote West Germany’s long-term diplomatic goals; the other defined Israel’s stability and security through a hard-line stance toward its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians and a resistance to outside mediation.

Consequently, bilateral relations between 1969 and 1974 were exceptionally prickly. There were public clashes over the Deutsche Kulturwoche in 1971, the Munich Olympics and the West German release of the Palestinian terrorists in 1972, and the Brandt government’s conduct during and after the October 1973 war. The several personal meetings between the two countries’ leaders, although symbolically important, rarely resolved the underlying tensions.
To be sure, both Brandt and Meir faced domestic critics of their increasingly chilly relationship. Brandt, who was backed by the pro-Arab business community and by leftist partisans of the Palestinians, was reviled by staunchly pro-Israel CDU and SPD figures and also by the Springer press. Meir’s opponents, reflecting a still widespread anti-German sentiment in Israel and reinforced by the religious and nationalist movements kindled after 1967, disparaged her efforts to appease Bonn.

Nonetheless, there were important elements of collaboration that continued after 1969, above all manifested in Bonn’s generous annual loans and the maintenance of secret military and intelligence ties. There were ongoing personal relationships between party officials and contacts between bankers, industrialists, and trade unionists as well as between religious leaders and academic figures. There was a modest rise in tourism, student exchanges, visiting artists, and sport competitions, along with increased media coverage on both sides.

Finally, it is important to underline that the West German–Israeli relationship was not a paramount one for either side. Third (and even fourth) parties large and small were always in the room. The US-Soviet rivalry in Europe and the Middle East; the aspirations of France and the EEC to play a greater role in world affairs; the economic power of the Arab oil-producers; and the growing influence of China and the Third World in the United Nations all affected policymaking in Bonn and Jerusalem, sometimes in parallel, more often in different directions.

In sum, one might best characterize the nine-year period between 1965 and 1974 as one of tenuous stability. The West German–Israeli relationship continued to be based on shared interests in security and recognition of the difficult past. But because the two governments and societies were evolving in different ways, the bond remained formal and brittle with little depth or understanding on either the official or popular level.

Yet, it survived these difficult nine years. Despite their diverging interests, the West German and Israeli governments established almost predictably contentious rituals. To be sure, the FRG, the stronger partner, repeatedly denied a special bond with Israel and underlined its neutrality in the Middle East conflict, but over and over again Bonn stretched the limits of its restrictions. Israel too held the line by barring a formal cultural agreement, withholding information on its secret diplomatic contacts, and unswervingly adhering to US policies.
Indeed, this tie was significant to both sides. West Germany and Israel exerted considerable effort to maintain the relationship, one that influenced their domestic and foreign policies and their national identities as well. This book has documented a history of friction, but its sub-theme has been the search by two highly asymmetric, historically linked governments to forge difficult compromises.
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Abu Mayer, 147
Abu Youssef, 226
Achenbach, Ernst, 132
Acheson, Dean, 151
Adenauer, Konrad, 13
   and Ben Gurion, 5
   and Egypt, 14, 20
   and France, 23, 62
   and Israel
      Eichmann trial, 9, 10, 11, 13
      German scientists in Egypt, 14
      relationship with Eshkol, 40, 293
      Restitution Agreement, 4, 5
      support for formal relations, 20
      visit to (1966), 25, 26
   funeral of, 51
   left wing critics, 49
See also Adenauer/Ben Gurion Agreement
Adenauer/Ben Gurion Agreement (1960), 1, 2, 39
Aff, Lutfif, 201, 203, 204, 205, 206
Agranat, Shmuel, 271
Ahdut HaAvoda, 78
Ahlers, Conrad, 149, 170, 215
Aktion ‘Frank./Kol’ (Project French Colonies), 12, 15, 16
diplomatic crisis caused by, 17, 21
public exposure of, 16, 17
Aktion ‘Geschäftsfreund’ (Project Business Partner), 12
Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (Project Reconciliation for Peace), 7, 55
Algeria, 51
   and Arab Israeli War (1967), 55, 65
   and El Al 426 hijacking, 88, 89, 91, 92
   and FRG, 132, 174, 279
   recall of ambassador, 21
   reestablishment of relations, 157, 58, 190
   and GDR, 109
and Palestinian question, 281
and United States, 262
See also Arab League
Allon Plan, 82
Allon, Yigal, 105, 112, 197
   and Dayan, rivalry with, 104, 120
   appointment of, 104
Alterman, Nathan, 46
Améry, Jean, 55, 58
anti colonialism, 48, 49, 77, 83, 189
antisemitism, 7, 41, 58, 115
Arab League
   and FRG, 51, 65, 80, 157, 210
   and GDR, failure to recognize, 21, 65
   and Middle East peace, rejection of direct negotiations, 64
   and Munich Olympics, 214
   boycott against Israel, 86, 101, 142, 190, 194, 199, 253, 262, 267
   Cairo meeting (1964), 15, 21
   Khartoum summit (1967), 64, 65
Arab Israeli War (1967), 47, 53, 63
   and Arab League, 64, 65
   and FRG, policy of non intervention in, 64
   UN Security Council Resolution, 242, 71
Arab Israeli War (1973), 246, 50, 251
   and Agranat Commission report, 271
   and FRG, 252, 54
   and Israeli Syrian Disengagement Agreement, 268
   and Sinai I Disengagement Agreement, 268
   cease fire resolutions, 250, 51
   Operation Nickel Grass, 249
Arafat, Yasser, 93, 201, 202, 269, 271
   and Battle of Karameh, 83
   and Dawson’s Field crisis, 145, 147
   and Fatah, 82
   reputation of, 83
See also Palestine Liberation Organization
Arendt, Adolf, 55
Ashkenazim, 30, 158
Assad, Hafez al, 250, 269
Augstein, Rudolf, 57
Auschwitz trials, 14
Australia, 267
Austria. See terrorism, Schönau crisis
Auswärtiges Amt (Federal Foreign Office), 32, 67, 85
and Israel, 139
Eichmann trial, 9
on deterioration of relations, 42
opposition to economic aid, 67, 85, 86, 117, 143
opposition to formal relations, 5, 13, 20
opposition to military assistance, 12, 87, 118, 173 75
Restitution Agreement, 115
Middle East policy, 38, 63
policy on Jerusalem, 87

Baader, Andreas, 191, 203
Bachmann, Josef, 76
Bahr, Egon, 98
and Israel, 290
annual aid negotiations, 67
on West German Israeli relations, 121
and Soviet Union, 121, 129, 277
and United States, 130
See also Ostpolitik
Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft (BfG), 37, 56
Bank Hapoalim., 37
Bar Lev line, 107, 246
Barzel, Rainer, 20, 289
Basic Treaty (1972), 190
Begin, Menachem, 28, 161, 231, 272, 273
and elections (1969), 120
opposition to disengagement talks, 268
opposition to Resolution 242, 77
Ben Ari, Yitzhak, 211
Benda, Ernst, 100
Ben Gurion, David, 52, 161, 172
and Adenauer, 5, 26
and Eichmann trial, 8 9, 10 11
and FRG, 4, 8, 12, 67
on “German question,” 6, 11
on German military assistance, 16
and non aligned nations, 2
attempted assassination of, 108
death of, 258
See also Adenauer/Ben Gurion Agreement
Ben Horin, Eliashiv, 136
and FRG, 217, 289 90
annual aid negotiations, 142, 143
criticism of, 141

hasbara campaign, 140, 141
meetings with Brandt, 137, 165
objection to Schumann paper, 163
relationship with Schmidt, 150
and Munich Olympics, 211
Ben Natan, Asher, 136
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 56
and EEC, Israeli application to, 69
and France, 193
and FRG, 39, 77, 86
annual aid negotiations, 67, 68, 86, 116, 117
defense of Pauls, 42
meeting with Bahr, 121
meeting with Schröder, 36
meetings with Brandt, 85, 122
objections to change in military assistance, 87, 118
on anti Israel demonstrations, 114
on German Jewish past, 36
on Israeli West German relationship, 122
public relations campaign, 37
relationship with Springer, 37
relationship with Strauss, 113
appointment of, 33 34
diplomatic style of, 36
protests against, 58, 77, 114, 115
Bensien, Peter, 175, 176
Berlin Wall, 11, 41
Berlin, West, 111, 128
disputes over, 277
threats to, 60, 97, 254
Birrenbach, Kurt
and Israel, 20, 22, 168 69
opposition to Nahostpolitik, 172
Black September, 145, 189, 201 3, 213
Blessing, Otto, 94
Bloch, Ernst, 55
Böll, Heinrich, 185 87
Boumediene, Houari, 89, 91, 280 81
Bourguiba, Habib, 234
Bouteflika, Abdelaziz, 91, 121
Brandt, Willy, 28, 43, 64, 66, 128, 217
acknowledgment of Nazi past, 133
and Algeria, 280 81
and American Jews, 149
and Arab League, 51, 80, 210
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 56
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 253
and Czechoslovakia, 96, 97
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146
and EEC, 279
and Egypt, 227, 282
and France, 129, 131, 209
Index

and GDR, 129
and Iran, 85
and Israel, 87
annual aid negotiations, 67, 143
commitment to combating terrorism, 217
equivocation on EEC application, 69
helicopter accident, 219, 20
meetings with Ben Horin, 137, 165
meetings with Ben Natan, 85, 86, 122
meetings with Eban, 52, 100, 138
military assistance to, 150, 242
on West German-Israeli relations, 131, 165, 240
Restitution Agreement, 116
support for formal relations, 8
support for normalization of relations, 244
visit to, 199, 239, 43
and Jordan, 123
and Kiesinger, differences with, 80, 111
and Lufthansa 615 hijacking, 215
and Meir
comparison to, 288
invitation for reciprocal visit, 243
meetings with, 116, 165, 199
and Middle East peace
policy of neutrality, 122, 242
support for direct negotiations, 245
and Munich Olympics, 211, 212
call for inquiry, 208
personal appeal to Arab leaders, 203
and Nobel Peace Prize, 156, 185
and Palestinian question, 227
and Poland, 129, 150
and Soviet Union, 98, 129, 155
and SPD, 225, 276
and Tunisia, visits to, 80, 121
and United Kingdom, 130
and United States, 130, 190, 228
crisis of government, 150
criticism of, 259, 274, 77
domestic challenges, 156
election of, 119
government declaration (1969), 120
government declaration (1973), 224
legacy of, 287
on Nahostpolitik, 132
re-election of, 199
renunciation of collective German guilt, 136
resignation of, 285, 87
vote of no confidence, 191
See also Kniefall; Nahostpolitik; Ostpolitik

Brezhnev, Leonid, 228, 264
and Arab-Israeli War (1973), 249
and détente, 103, 221, 22, 264
and Egypt, 108
and Middle East peace, 222, 223
and Moscow Treaty, 129
and United States, 188, 222, 264
reaction to Brandt’s election, 119
Brundage, Avery, 207
Brussels Conference for Soviet Jewry (1971), 161
Bulgaria, 156
See also Ostpolitik
Bundesnachrichtendienst (Federal Intelligence Service), 174, 176
Cambodia, 109, 127
Capital Assistance Treaty (1973), 226
Carstens, Karl, 16
Castro, Fidel, 234
CDU. See Christian Democratic Union
Ceausescu, Nicolae, 193, 267
China, 47
and FRG, 191
and Soviet Union, 3, 27, 61, 107, 188
and United States, 155, 188
Three World doctrine, 263
Christian Democratic Union (CDU), 28, 43, 99, 105
and Arab-Israeli War (1973), 252
and Brandt, criticism of, 128, 215, 255, 274, 285
and Israel, 140
and Scheel, criticism of, 172
elections (1969), 118
elections, state (1974), 276
support for Nahostpolitik, 130
See also Christian Social Union; Grand Coalition
Christian Social Union (CSU), 28, 43, 99
and Brandt, criticism of, 128, 215, 255, 274, 285
and Israel, 140
elections (1969), 118
elections, state (1974), 276
support for Nahostpolitik, 130
See also Christian Democratic Union; Grand Coalition
Cohen, Victor, 205
Comay, Michael, 84
Common Market. See European Economic Community
Conference on Jewish Material Claims, 4
Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), 189, 194, 259
CSU. See Christian Social Union
Cuba, 234
Culmann, Herbert, 214
Czechoslovakia, 96, 228
and FRG, 51, 94, 96
and Munich Olympics, 207
invasion of, 92, 94, 96
and FRG, response to, 98, 99
and Israel, response to, 99, 100
Prague Spring, 97, 99
See also Ostpolitik

Dayan, Moshe, 79, 104, 197, 219
and Allon, rivalry with, 104, 120
and Meir, 230, 265
refusal to resign, 272
reputation of, 57
support for settlements, 230
de Gaulle, Charles, 23, 111
and Arab-Israel War (1967), 62
and Czechoslovakia, 97
and FRG, 97
and NATO, 62
and Soviet Union, 62
détente, 3, 103
obstacles to, 127
threats to, 221
Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen mit Israel (GFW), 52
Deutsche Kulturwoche, 178, 79
and FRG, response to, 183
and Israel, public outcry against, 179
program, 179
Dinstein, Zvi, 171
Dubček, Alexander, 80, 94
Dutschke, Rudi, 76

Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution, 235
East Germany. See German Democratic Republic
Eban, Abba, 46, 74, 139, 180, 234
and EEC, 69, 141, 194
and Egypt, 137
and FRG
annual aid negotiations, 67
defense of Pauls, 42
establishment of relations, 22
meetings with Brandt, 52, 100, 138
meetings with Scheel, 138, 149, 170, 171
on Israeli-West German relations, 138
on Scheel visit, 172
visit to Bonn, 122, 137
visit to Munich, 124
and Middle East peace, 138, 213, 234
and Schönau crisis, 236
and Soviet Union, 160, 258, 266
and terrorism, 138
appointment of, 39
Hasbara campaign, 82
Egypt, 51, 80
and FRG, 18, 63, 132, 157, 174, 226, 27, 282
collaboration with Israel, 16
economic assistance, 226, 227
military assistance, 87
presence of German rocket scientists, 13, 14
recall of ambassador, 21
recognition of GDR, 20
reestablishment of relations, 190
and GDR, 63, 109
de facto recognition of, 19
recognition of, 109
and Israel, 137, 245
and Munich Olympics, 204, 205, 207
and Soviet Union, 223
expulsion of military advisors, 188
military assistance, 18, 61, 107, 108, 127, 249
Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, 155
and United States, 159, 192, 232, 262
See also Arab League; Arab Israeli War (1967) (1973); Nasser, Gamal Abdel; War of Attrition
Ehmke, Horst, 170, 289
and American Jews, 149
connection to Third Reich, 133
on West German-Israeli relations, 137
Eichmann, Adolf, trial of, 8
Elazar, David, 271
Eppler, Erhard, 116, 132, 133
Erhard, Ludwig, 16, 28
and Aktion “Frankreich/Kolonien,” 15
and Egypt, 14, 18, 19, 20
and Hallstein doctrine, 17
and Israel
military assistance to, 19, 22
normalization of relations, 38
on West German-Israeli relations, 23
recognition of, 20
rejection of formal relations, 13
austerity measures, 28
fall of government, 16, 43
Eshkol, Levi, 13, 28, 46, 74
and El Al 426 hijacking, 90
and FRG, 17
  establishment of formal relations, 21, 22
  on German atonement, 25
  on Israeli West German relations, 23, 66
  relationship with Adenauer, 40
austerity measures, 28
creation of Labor Party, 78
death of, 104
on borders, 79
recognition of Oder Neisse line, 41
See also Arab Israeli War (1967)

European Economic Community (EEC), 189, 278
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 60
and Czechoslovakia, 95
and Egypt, 194
and France, 62, 194
  proposal for Middle East free trade zone, 194
veto of British membership, 81
and FRG, 142, 228
and Israel, 164, 257, 266
  application for associate membership, 14, 68 70, 85
  opposition to Brussels declaration, 256
  preferential tariff agreement, 141, 194
and Middle East peace, 263
and Munich Olympics, 209
and United Kingdom, 130, 142, 279
Brussels declaration (1973), 256, 257
Copenhagen summit (1973), 257
Schumann paper, 163, 164, 165, 170, 172

Fatah, 82, 88, 93, 202
See also Arafat, Yasser

FDP. See Free Democratic Party

Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)
and Arab League, 51, 64, 80, 101, 157, 210
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 55, 59
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 252, 54, 258, 60
and Czechoslovakia, 80
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146, 47
and EEC, 62, 69, 71, 81, 142, 228
  support for British application, 130
  support for Israeli application, 14
and Egypt, 18, 20, 63, 226, 27, 282
  economic assistance to, 20, 227
  military assistance to, 87
  presence of German rocket scientists, 13, 14
  recall of ambassador, 19
  removal of German scientists, 23
and France, 62, 129, 157
and GDR, 51, 110
and Iran, 85, 86
and Israel, 5, 40, 169, 72
  absence of formal relations, 23
  annual aid negotiations, 38, 40, 67, 68, 85, 87, 116, 17, 142, 43, 176
  anti Israel demonstrations, 77, 115, 138
  anti Israel sentiments, 59, 140
  change in nature of relationship, 135, 36
  collaborative research projects, 175, 76
  commercial relations, 8, 37, 52, 85, 244
  cultural exchanges, 8, 37, 85, 111, 165, 166
  deterioration of relations, 149
  establishment of formal relations, 21, 22, 32, 33
  military assistance to, 15, 22, 87, 117, 18, 150, 173, 75
  recognition of Oder Neisse line, 41
  rejection of special relationship, 121
  relations with EEC, 43
and Jordan, 51, 131
and Middle East peace, support for mediated negotiations, 72
and Palestinians, 226
and Poland, 96
and Saudi Arabia, 87
and Soviet Union, 81, 121, 254
  establishment of formal relations, 4, 51, 98
  invasion of Czechoslovakia, 96
  reaction to Brandt’s election, 119
  recognition of GDR, 111
and Tunisia, 131
and United Kingdom, 62, 129, 157, 173, 229
and United Nations, 61, 84, 245
and United States, 5, 81, 130, 157, 190
  NATO crisis, 62, 63
  tensions between, 254, 278
and Yugoslavia, 80
anti government demonstrations, 61, 76
attacks on Jewish targets, 7, 41, 115
economic conditions, 28, 61, 156, 191, 224, 273
elections (1969), 118 19
elections (1972), 191
elections, state (1974), 275
Emergency Laws, 61, 76
Guillaumé espionage affair, 283 85
Palestinian terrorism in, 115, 125, 191, 201
pro Arab demonstrations, 138
social conditions, 29, 49, 275
See also Munich Olympics; Nahopolitik; Ostpolitik
France, 138, 279
and EEC, 70, 81, 163, 278
and Four Power talks, 108
and FRG, 62, 129, 157, 172
and Israel, 108, 193
and Middle East peace, 263
and NATO, 63
See also de Gaulle, Charles
Frangi, Abdallah, 226
Frank, Paul, 86, 132, 176, 217, 245
Free Democratic Party (FDP), 56, 119, 275
and CDU, 105, 150
coalition with SPD, 128
elections (1969), 118
Fried, Erich, 59
Gahal, 28, 120
Galili Plan, 231
Gaza, 79
economic integration of, 230, 231
settlements in, 79, 120
See also occupied territories
Gazit, Mordechai, 19
Gehlhoff, Walter, 118
Geneva Disarmament Conference (1964), 15
Genscher, Hans Dietrich, 138
and Munich Olympics, 206, 208
connection to Third Reich, 133
refusal to resign, 285
German Cultural Institute, 178, 179
German Democratic Republic (GDR), 138
and Egypt, 17
and FRG, 7, 51
and Soviet Union, 61
and United Nations, 60
Middle East policy, 63, 109 10
recognition of, 20, 109
See also Ostpolitik
German Federation of Trade Unions, 8
German Socialist Student Union (SDS), 59

Germania Judaica, 8
German Israeli Association (DIG), 37, 55, 85, 169, 244
Gerstenmaier, Eugen, 8, 18
Globke, Hans, 9, 10, 11
Golan Heights
economic integration of, 230
protests in, 269
settlements in, 79, 120, 197
See also occupied territories
Goldmann, Nahum, 115, 116, 167, 290
and Pauls, defense of, 42
call for the neutralization of Israel, 140
peace campaign of, 81
proposal for new restitution agreement, 142, 237
See also Restitution Agreement
Gollwitzer, Helmut, 55
Grab, Walter, 166
Grand Coalition, 43, 49 51, 76
and Israel, 69
divisions within, 80 81, 98 99, 105, 110 11
Middle East policy, 44
See also Christian Democratic Union; Christian Social Union; Social Democratic Party
Grass, Günter, 49, 55
and Deutsche Kulturwoche, 179, 181, 182
and Israel, 45 46, 69
on Arab Israeli War (1967), 57
on reconciliation, 46
Great Britain. See United Kingdom
Greece, 47
Gromyko, Andrei, 98, 155, 258, 263, 280
Guevara, Ernesto, 48
Guillaume, Günter, 283, 284, 285
Habash, George, 234, 269
Hallstein doctrine, 5, 13, 14, 17, 20, 24
Hamm Brücher, Hildegard, 168
Harkort, Günter, 86
Harpprecht, Klaus, 150
Hasbara campaign, 82, 140, 141
Hassuna, Abdul Halek, 51, 69
Hausner, Gideon, 170
Heath, Edward, 207, 229, 279
Heine, Heinrich, 179
Heinemann, Gustav, 166, 286
and election of, 105, 106
and Israel, 100, 106
and Munich Olympics, 211
and Romania, 156
and Statute of Limitations, 105

Index
censure of Arab governments, 210
condemnation of Black September, 207
meeting with Eban, 138
Herut Party, 11, 21, 180
Betar, 181
Hesselbach, Walter, 132, 136, 149
Hillenbrand, Martin, 254
Histadrut Labor Union, 8, 167
Houphouët Boigny, Félix, 232
Hundhammer, Alois, 125
Hungary, 60, 207
See also Ostpolitik
Hussein, King of Jordan, 82, 83
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 145
and Egypt, 80
and Israel, 270
and Jerusalem, 82
and Munich Olympics, 207
and Palestinian problem, 144
attempted assassination of, 145
declaration of martial law, 147
Idan, Avner, 118
Institute of German History, 166
International Federation of Air Line Pilots’ Associations (IFALPA), 91
Iran, 85, 86, 267, 280
Iraq, 17, 109
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 55, 65
and FRG, recall of ambassador, 21
and GDR, 109
See also Arab League
Ismail, Hafez, 227, 232
Israel, 30, 31
and Africa, 195, 267
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146
and EEC, 162, 64
application for associate membership, 14, 68, 70, 85
opposition to Brussels declaration, 256
preferential tariff agreement, 141, 194
and Egypt, 13
air strikes on, 137
rejection of peace initiatives, 159
and El Al 426 hijacking, 89, 90, 91, 92
and France, 90, 122, 138, 193, 231
and FRG, 5, 16, 149, 169, 72, 215
absence of formal relations, 23
annual aid negotiations, 38, 40, 67, 68, 85, 87, 116, 17, 142, 43, 176
anti German demonstrations, 170, 181
anti German sentiments, 41, 101, 141, 216
arms sales to, 6
change in nature of relationship, 135, 36
collaborative research projects, 175, 76
commercial relations, 8, 37, 52, 85, 244
cultural exchanges, 11, 66, 85, 165, 67, 178, 260
deterioration of relations, 149
establishment of formal relations, 21, 22, 32, 33
indifference to German reunification, 40
insistence on special relationship, 122, 241
military assistance, 15, 22, 87, 117, 18, 150, 173, 75
reaction to Brandt election, 119
recognition of Oder Neisse line, 41
relations with EEC, 43
visit from Bundestag delegation, 169
and Italy, 90
and Jordan, 43
and Lebanon, 140, 212, 233
and Libya, 233
and Middle East peace
insistence on direct negotiations, 136
strategy of attrition, 192
and Moscow Treaty, 144
and Soviet Union, 43, 100, 127, 160, 62, 193, 267
and Syria, 218
and United Kingdom, 149, 163, 174, 193
and United States, 144, 148, 160, 188, 267
military assistance, 22, 108, 137, 148, 233, 249, 254
anti Arab sentiments, 209
anti government protests, 265
economic conditions, 28, 68, 158, 197, 229, 266
elections (1969), 120
elections (1974), 265
immigration, 28, 50, 158, 197, 266
National Unity government, 77, 81
nuclear program of, 16
release of political prisoners, 92, 148
social conditions, 29, 50, 158
terrorist attacks in, 82, 93, 141, 188, 201, 269, 271
See also Arab Israeli War (1967) (1973); War of Attrition
Index

Israelisch Deutsche Handelskammer (IDHK), 52
Italy, 15, 70, 92
Jackson, Henry F., 221
Jahn, Gerhard, 120
Japan, 267
Japanese Red Army (JRA), 189
Jarring, Gunnar, 78, 79, 81, 159
Jaspers, Karl, 49
Jerusalem, status of, 71, 72, 87
Jewish Defense League, 181
Johnson, Lyndon, 15, 18
Jordan, 71
and FRG, 131
  economic assistance, 63, 64, 227
  recall of ambassador, 21
  reestablishment of relations, 51
and GDR, 109
and Israel, 93
and Palestinians, 144
Dawson's Field crisis, 145-47
refugees in, 63
See also Arab League; Arab Israeli War (1967); Black September; Hussein
Kahane, Meir, 181
Karameh, Battle of, 83
Khaled, Leila, 145
Kiesinger, Kurt Georg, 49, 52, 66
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 56, 61
and Brandt, differences with, 80, 111
and Czechoslovakia, 96, 97
and GDR, refusal to recognize, 61, 80
and Israel
  annual aid negotiations, 116
  equivocation on EEC application, 69
  meeting with Ben Gurion, 52
  on West German Israeli relations, 44
  and Soviet Union, 99
and Statute of Limitations, 113
and United States, visit to, 66
appointment of, 43-44
on policy of neutrality, 113
Kissinger, Henry, 234, 280
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 249, 258
  cease fire resolution, 250
  support for renewed fighting, 251
and China, visit to, 155
and EEC, 256, 257, 278
and Egypt, 232
and FRG, 130, 209, 255
and Meir, relationship with, 268
and Middle East peace, 160, 267, 268, 270
promotion of status quo, 192, 223
shuttle diplomacy, 262, 63
and Palestinian diplomacy, 262, 63
and Palestinian question, 270
and Saudi Arabia, 269
and Soviet Union, 223, 250
and United Kingdom, 250
and War of Attrition, 108
Kniefall, 129, 151-53
and FRG, public response to, 152
and Israel, public response to, 153
Knoke, Karl Hermann, 101, 112
Kollek, Teddy, 37, 181, 182, 262
Kollwitz, Kathé, 179
Koschnick, Hans, 238, 289
Kosygin, Alexei, 97
Kozo, Okamoto, 203
Kreisky, Bruno, 235-36, 266
Kuwait, 21
See also Arab League
Labor Alignment, 81, 120, 265
Labor Party, 50, 78
Labor Zionism, 50
Lahr, Rolf, 39, 68
Lapidoth, 101
Lavie, Yeshayahu, 175
Lebanon
  and FRG, 21, 190, 227
  and Israel, 140, 212
  and Palestinians, 140
See also Arab League
Levinger, Moshe, 78
Likud, 265, 269
Lübke, Heinrich, 36
Malik, Yakov, 196
Mannesmann, 86
Mapai Party, 8, 28, 78, 104
McNamara, Robert, 46, 287
Mehta, Zubin, 166
Meinhof, Ulrike, 58, 186, 191, 203
Meir, Golda, 120, 121, 122, 23, 272
and Brandt, 198
  comparison of, 288
  meetings with, 116, 165, 199, 241-42
and Dayan, support for, 231
and EEC
  objection to Schumann paper, 165
  opposition to Brussels declaration, 256
and Egypt, 160, 168
and France, visit to, 231
and FRG, 181
  annual aid negotiations, 116
  establishment of formal relations, 22, 32
Index

meeting with Böll, 186
meeting with Pauls, 34
meeting with Scheel, 171
on Deutsche Kulturwoche, 181
on Israeli West German relations, 243
and Jordan, 270
and Middle East peace, 234, 269
disengagement negotiations, 268
insistence on direct negotiations, 104
land for peace policy, 120
rejection of mediation, 192
and Munich Olympics, 211, 212
and PLO, 212, 271
and Schönau crisis, 236
and Socialist International meetings, 116, 160, 194, 231, 256
and Soviet Union, 160 61
relationship with Kissinger, 268
relationship with Nixon, 192
and Vatican, visit to, 232
and War of Attrition, 108, 121
appointment of, 104 5
election of, 120
government declaration (1969), 121
legacy of, 273
re election of, 197
reputation of, 230
resignation of, 272
See also Arab Israeli War (1973); War of Attrition
Meroz, Yohanan, 183
Mizrahim, 30, 50
Möller, Alex, 138, 143
Moscow Treaty (1970), 129, 144, 279
Movement for Peace and Security, 78
Movement for the Greater Land of Israel, 78
Munich Olympics (1972), 199 200
and Black September, 201 3
and FRG
criticism of, 206, 207, 210
domestic consequences, 208 9
response to crisis, 203 6, 211
memorial service, 207
security measures for, 200 1
Nahostpolitik, 86, 110, 113, 130 32, 173
and Israel, 132 33, 139, 173
criticism of, 141
limits to, 131
obstacles to, 80, 279 80
See also Brandt, Willy; Scheel, Walter; Wischniewski Hans Jürgen
Nassal, Yussef, 201, 206
Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 14, 17, 55
and Aktion “Frankreich/Kolonien,” 16 17
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 147
and GDR, 18
and FRG, 18 19
and Palestinians, 144
and Soviet Union, 16, 18, 108
and War of Attrition, 106, 108, 144
death of, 144
funeral of, 147
See also Arab Israeli War (1967)
National Democratic Party (NPD), 41, 43, 106, 111
elections (1966), 43, 49
elections (1968), 76
elections (1969), 112, 118
National Religious Party, 120, 265, 269
NATO. See North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Nau, Alfred, 149
Niemöller, Christoph, 179
Nigeria, 47
Nixon doctrine, 148
Nixon shock, 157, 158
Nixon, Richard, 103 4
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 249
and China, visit to, 155, 188
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146
and EEC, 278
and Egypt, 232
and FRG, 130, 228, 255
and Israel, 144, 160
military assistance to, 108, 233
relationship with Meir, 192
and Middle East peace, 223, 263
and Schönau crisis, 236
and Soviet Union, 188, 264
domestic challenges, 221
election of, 188
on Munich Olympics, 207
Nowak, Walter, 226
Nonaligned Summit Meeting (1973), 234
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 27, 62
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 60
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 250
and Czechoslovakia, 97
and France, 62
Nowak, Walter, 226
NPD. See National Democratic Party
Index

Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (1968), 75, 81
occupied territories, 71, 81
and FRG, 72, 79
and United Nations, 84
Galili Plan, 231
Hasbara campaign, 82
military emcampments in, 109
public opinion on, 230
See also Gaza; Golan Heights; Sinai; settlements; West Bank
Oder Neisse line, 41, 129, 150
Ohnesorg, Beno, 47, 58
oil crisis (1967), 60, 64, 65, 70
oil crisis (1973), 223, 232, 259, 267
Operation Damocles, 14
Operation Inferno. See Karameh, Battle of
Operation Wrath of God, 218
Organization of African Unity (OAU), 196
Organization of Arab Oil Exporting Countries (OAPEC), 249, 281
Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), 3, 249, 253
Osswald, Albert, 198
Ostpolitik, 50, 75, 157, 279
and Bulgaria, 156
and Czechoslovakia, 94, 96, 156, 228
effects of invasion on, 98
and Four Power talks, 150
and GDR, 128, 150, 190
and Hungary, 156
and Israel, 173
and Poland, 129, 150, 153, 156, 190, 191
and Romania, 156
and Soviet Union, 95, 129, 144, 155, 190, 191
and Yugoslavia, 156, 228
criticism of, 141, 151
domestic dimensions of, 128
goals of, 127
obstacles to, 61, 62, 80, 81, 98, 99, 156, 277
See also Brandt, Willy; Bahr, Egon
Pakistan, 84
Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), 218
and FRG, 226
and Israel, 188, 212, 271
and United States, 270
formation of, 93
support for two state solution, 269
See also Arafat, Yasser
Palestinian Student Association (GUPS), 209
Palestinian Workers’ Union (GUPA), 209
Palestinians, 233, 269
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 55
and Egypt, 144
and FRG, 59
and Soviet Union, 189, 202
and United Nations, 84
fedayeen, 82, 144, 147
in Jordan, 144
in Lebanon, 140, 212
in Syria, 212
national movement of, 53
See also Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Palestine Liberation Organization; refugees
Paul VI, 232
Pauls, Rolf, 42, 79, 85
ambassador to US, 113
and Israel, 41
appointment of, 33
deporture of, 74, 75
diplomatic style of, 35, 36
on reconciliation, 34
protests against, 34, 35
response to anti German sentiments, 41, 42
response to recognition of Oder Neisse line, 41
peace movements, 31, 79, 272
Peres, Shimon
and FRG, 12
establishment of relations, 22
and Strauss, relationship with, 6
on German military assistance, 17
on Israeli West German relations, 66
PFLP. See Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Pilz, Wolfgang, 14
PLO. See Palestine Liberation Organization
Poland, 60, 156
and Munich Olympics, 207
See also Ostpolitik
Pompidou, Georges, 279
and FRG, 129, 209
and Israel, 193
and Middle East peace, 228
death of, 265
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), 93, 190, 202
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 145, 47
and El Al 426 hijacking, 88, 92
opposition to two state solution, 269
Prakla, 101

Primakov, Yevgeny, 160
Puttkamer, Jesco von, 217, 237, 260
and Deutsche Kulturwoche, 179, 81, 182
appointment of, 154, 55
on West German Israeli relations, 183

Rabin, Yitzhak, 272, 273
and War of Attrition, 107
reputation of, 57
Radicals Decree, 191
Rafi Party, 78
Red Army Faction (RAF), 48, 128, 191
Redies, Helmut, 139, 226
refugees, 167, 231
and FRG, 57, 72, 79, 293
aid to, 51, 63, 64
and Vatican, 232
See also occupied territories; Palestinians
Restitution Agreement (1952), 3, 5, 17, 22, 40
advance on, 142
and United States, 5
extension of, 115, 16
proposal for new agreement, 142, 167, 237, 38, 290
Restitution Purchasing Mission, 5, 6, 13, 33
reunification of Germany, 40, 41, 63, 95
See also Hallstein doctrine
Rogers Plan, 127
Rogers, William, 160
Romania, 27, 51, 156, 267
See also Ostpolitik
Sadat, Anwar, 155, 226, 268, 282
and Israel, 159, 222, 239, 273
and Soviet Union, 192
and United States, 193
See also Arab Israeli War (1973)
Sakharov, Andrei, 264
Salameh, Ali Hassan, 233
Sapir, Pinhas, 229, 230
Sartre, Jean Paul, 55
Saudi Arabia, 21, 132, 245, 269
and FRG, 87, 279
See also Arab League
Scheel, Walter, 105, 122
and Arab League, 210
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 253
and Brandt, support for, 283
and China, visit to, 190
and EEC, 209
and Egypt, visit to, 227
and France, 157
and Israel, 218, 289
annual aid negotiations, 143
meetings with Eban, 138, 149, 170, 171
on Schumann paper, 170
on West German Israeli relations, 132, 172, 198
opposition to military assistance, 118, 174, 175
rejection of investment agreement, 171
visit to, 169, 72
and Jordan, visit to, 227
and Lebanon, visit to, 227
and Romania, 156
and Soviet Union, 155
and terrorism, 138
and United States, 254
break with CDU, 119
connection to Third Reich, 133, 134
protests against, 181
visit to Auschwitz, 150
See also Nahostpolitik; Ostpolitik
Schiller, Karl, 86, 138, 157
connection to Third Reich, 133, 134
defection from government, 191
Schlesinger, James, 255
Schleyer, Martin, 274
Schmid, Carlo, 169
Schmidt, Helmut, 42, 118, 122
and Brandt, criticism of, 276
and Israel
opposition to new restitution agreement, 238
relationship with Ben Horin, 150
support for military cooperation, 173, 175
and SPD, 287
on Arab Israeli War (1967), 56
Schröder, Gerhard
and Egypt, 20
and Israel, 20, 32, 36, 106, 169
electoral defeat (1969), 106
Schumann, Maurice, 163, 207
Schuster, Zachariah, 45
Schütz, Klaus, 261, 62
debate over, 78, 79
expansion of, 231
Sharett, Moshe, 4
Sharon, Ariel, 268
Shazar, Zalman, 34, 46
Shek, Zeev, 46
Shelepin, Alexander, 18
Shukeiry, Ahmad, 65
Siemens, 101
Index

Simon, Akiva Ernst, 179
Sinai, 159, 187
and War of Attrition, 107
settlements in, 79, 120, 192, 197
See also Arab Israeli War (1967) (1973); occupied territories
Sisco, Joseph, 160
Social Democratic Party (SPD), 28, 49, 105, 275
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 252
and Israel, 8, 69, 168
coalition with FDP, 128
elections (1969), 118
elections, state (1974), 275
Jungsozialisten, 225, 275
See also Grand Coalition
Socialist German Student Union (SDS), 77
Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, 264
South Africa, 267
Soviet Union, 26
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 53
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 247, 250, 51
and China, 3, 27, 47, 61, 107, 188
and Egypt, 17, 188, 223
military assistance to, 18, 61, 107, 108, 127, 249
Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, 155
and France, 62
and FRG, 81, 96, 121, 254
reaction to Brandt’s election, 119
rebuff of Bonn’s overtures, 51
support for GDR, 111
terms for rapprochement, 98
and GDR, 61
and Israel, 43, 84, 100, 108, 160, 62
and Middle East peace, 103, 160
and Munich Olympics, 207
and Palestinians, 189, 202
and Syria, 27, 61, 249
and United Nations, 212
and United States, 127, 147, 263, 64
détente, 103, 4, 188, 221, 24
rivalry with, 2, 3, 26, 27, 47, 127, 155
and War of Attrition, 107, 144
emigration of Jews, 41, 161, 193, 221, 236
See also Ostpolitik
SPD. See Social Democratic Party
Springer, Axel, 37, 38, 57, 102, 3, 166
and FRG, 256
protests against, 52, 53, 76, 77, 103
and Israel, 66, 69
press, 52, 53, 58, 191
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 57
and Jerusalem, 72
criticism of Brandt, 153
criticism of Meinhof, 186
pro Israel tone, 140, 167
Statute of Limitations (on Nazi War Crimes), 112, 13
and Israel, 14, 15, 22, 112
and United States, 22
extension of, 17, 100
Strauss, Franz Josef, 6, 10, 66
and Israel
annual aid negotiations, 116
relationship with Ben Natan, 113
support for EEC application, 69
support for formal relations, 20
visit to, 15
student demonstrations. See youth movements
Sudan, 21, 109, 157, 58, 174, 190
See also Arab League
Suez Canal, 107, 268
closure of, 55, 60
Suez Crisis (1956), 5
Switzerland, 146, 149
Syria, 65, 148
and Egypt, 17
and FRG, 21, 132
and GDR, 63, 109
and Israel, 108, 218
and Jordan, 147
and Palestinians, 27
and Soviet Union, 27, 61, 249
and United Nations, 84
and United States, 262
See also Arab League; Arab Israeli War (1967) (1973)
Talhouni, Bahjat, 123
terrorism, 93, 108, 138, 269
Dawson’s Field crisis, 145, 47
El Al 426 hijacking, 88, 92
in FRG, 115, 125, 191
in Israel, 82, 141, 188, 269, 271
Lufthansa 615 hijacking, 186, 213, 15
Schönau crisis, 235, 37
See also Munich Olympics; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Palestine Liberation Organization
Tetzaff, Alfred, 276
Thant, U, 90, 91

Talhouni, Bahjat, 123
terrorism, 93, 108, 138, 269
Dawson’s Field crisis, 145, 47
El Al 426 hijacking, 88, 92
in FRG, 115, 125, 191
in Israel, 82, 141, 188, 269, 271
Lufthansa 615 hijacking, 186, 213, 15
Schönau crisis, 235, 37
See also Munich Olympics; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Palestine Liberation Organization
Tetzaff, Alfred, 276
Thant, U, 90, 91
Third Reich, 31
legacy of, 7, 23, 30, 112
politicians with connections to, 133, 35
renunciation of, 128, 133, 218
See also Eichmann, Adolf
Thyssen, 86
Tito, Josip Broz, 214, 228
Török, Alexander, 33, 40
Tunisia, 121, 131, 207, 234
See also Arab League
Turkey, 267

Ultricht, Walter, 18, 19, 109, 110
United Kingdom
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 250
and Czechoslovakia, 97
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146
and EEC, 130, 142, 278
and FRG, 129, 157, 173, 229
and Israel, 165, 173, 193, 229
and Soviet Union, 97
and United States, 188, 229
United Nations, 127, 28, 189, 212
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 60
and Czechoslovakia, 97
and FRG, 61, 245
and GDR, 245
and Israel, 245
accusation of war crimes, 196
censure for retaliatory strikes, 93
condemnation of cease fire violation, 83
condemnation of incursions into Lebanon, 140
condemnation of skyjacking, 234
resolution condemning attacks in Lebanon, 196
Article 107, 97
Article 53, 97
Geneva Conference, 257, 258, 269
Human Rights Commission, 112
Resolution 242, 71, 130, 138, 227
Resolution 338, 251
resolution on occupied territories, 84
World Conference on Human Rights, 75, 77, 83, 84
United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), 51
United States, 13, 26
and Algeria, 262
and Arab Israeli War (1967), 53, 60
and Arab Israeli War (1973), 247, 250, 51
and Czechoslovakia, 97
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 145
and Egypt, 159, 192, 232, 262
and El Al 426 hijacking, 91
and FRG, 5, 130, 157, 190
assessment of Ostpolitik, 157
NATO crisis, 62, 63
tensions between, 254, 278
and Israel, 143, 144, 148, 160, 188, 267
military assistance to, 22, 108, 137, 148, 233, 249, 254
and Jordan, 15, 270
and Middle East peace, 103, 159, 60, 262, 63, 267
and Moscow Treaty, 144
and Palestinians, 270
and Soviet Union, 127, 147, 263, 64
détente, 103, 4, 187, 221, 24
rivalry with, 2, 3, 26, 27, 47, 127, 155
and Statute of Limitations, 15
and Syria, 27, 262
and United Kingdom, 188
and United Nations, 212
and War of Attrition, 107, 127, 144
on Brandt’s election, 119
race riots, 48
USSR. See Soviet Union
Vanik, Charles, 221
Vietnam War, 26, 47, 60, 107, 127, 187
Paris Peace Accords (1973), 221
protests against, 29, 48
Vogel, Rolf, 10
Walden, Mathias, 57
Waldheim, Kurt, 209, 234
Waldorf Astoria meeting, 2, 7
See also Adenauer/Ben Gurion Agreement
War of Attrition (1969-70), 106, 9, 121
cease fire, 127, 144
Warsaw Pact, 96, 111
See also Czechoslovakia, invasion of
Warsaw Treaty (1970), 129, 150
Wehner, Herbert, 122, 168, 285
Weichmann, Hermann, 111
West Bank, 79, 81, 270
economic integration of, 230, 231
peace proposals for, 81, 82
restrictions on right of return, 72
settlements in, 78, 79, 109, 120, 192, 197
See also occupied territories
Index

West Germany. See Federal Republic of Germany
Willikens, Dietrich, 175
Wilson, Harold, 97, 130, 256
Wischnewski, Hans Jürgen, 120, 122, 132
and Arafat, meeting with, 147
and Dawson’s Field crisis, 146 47
and Jordan, 64, 80
and Meir, meeting with, 168
mission to Middle East, 157
See also Nahostpolitik
Wolfmann, Alfred, 141, 149, 153
World Health Organization (WHO), 167
World Zionist Organization (WZO), 81
Yadin, Yigael, 220
Yariv, Aharon, 218
yekkes, 177
Yemen, 17, 21, 55

Yemen, South, 109, 157
See also Arab League
youth movements, 48
in FRG, 29, 49, 181
anti Israel demonstrations, 77,
114, 138
anti Springer demonstrations, 53,
76, 103
Außerparlamentarische Opposition
(APO), 49
Kompass, 114
in Israel, 29 30, 50
Yugoslavia, 156, 213 14,
228
Zagreb. See Yugoslavia
Zaire, 47
Zamir, Zvi, 205, 211,
218
Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, 116,
217
Zionism, 59, 77, 78